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The Negotiation and Fashioning of Female Honour in Early Modern London

by

Tim Reinke-Williams BA, MA

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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London, November 2006.

DECLARATION

This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. None of the material in this thesis has been published prior to the date of submission.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines concepts of female honour circulating among the middling and poorer sorts in Elizabethan and seventeenth-century London. Utilising prescriptive advice books, secular and ecclesiastical court records, vestry minutes, ballads, diaries, pamphlets and plays, the thesis explores how ordinary women might fashion respectable identities for themselves. By negotiating some degree of autonomy within the restrictive boundaries imposed by a patriarchal society, women might earn praise and social credit from their families, friends, and neighbours. It starts from the premiss that while sexual honesty remained an essential pre-requisite for female honour, women who sought to acquire a good reputation were required to do much more than protect their virginity before marriage and remain sexually faithful to their husbands. Women as individuals were judged by their physical appearance and the clothes they wore; as members of families and households by the successful performance of their roles as mothers, housewives and mistresses; and as members of local communities by their interactions with their neighbours, both male and female. In addition female honour was linked to the skill with which women negotiated the unique physical environments of early modern London and its hinterlands, in particular the fields, streets, and alehouses of the capital. Women had to undergo constant scrutiny, and often criticism, from both male and female neighbours, but the thesis argues that contemporary codes of honour, reputation, and credit could also empower women, by bringing them respect and admiration.

ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library
Capp, <i>When Gossips Meet</i>	B. Capp, <i>When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England</i> (Oxford, 2003)
Earle, <i>City Full of People</i>	P. Earle, <i>A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650-1750</i> (London, 1994)
Earle, <i>English Middle Class</i>	P. Earle, <i>The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730</i> (London, 1989)
Fletcher, <i>Gender</i>	A. Fletcher, <i>Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800</i> (New Haven and London, 1995)
Foyster, <i>Manhood</i>	E. Foyster, <i>Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage</i> (London, 1999)
GL	Guildhall Library
Gowing, <i>Common Bodies</i>	L. Gowing, <i>Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England</i> (New Haven and London, 2003)
Gowing, <i>Domestic Dangers</i>	L. Gowing, <i>Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London</i> (Oxford, 1996).
Griffiths, <i>Youth and Authority</i>	P. Griffiths, <i>Youth and Authority: formative experiences in England 1560-1640</i> (Oxford, 1996)
Jeaffreson (ed.), <i>Middlesex County Records</i>	J. C. Jeaffreson (ed.), <i>Middlesex County Records</i> (London, 1886-92)
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
Mendelson and Crawford, <i>Women</i>	S. Mendelson and P. Crawford, <i>Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720</i> (Oxford, 1998).
<i>Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614</i>	W. Le Hardy, <i>Calendar to the Sessions Records, 1612-1614</i> (London, 1935)
OBP	Old Bailey Proceedings
Pepys	W. G. Day (ed.), <i>The Pepys Ballads</i> (Cambridge, 1987)
Pepys, <i>Diary</i>	R. Latham and W. Matthews (eds.), <i>The Diary of Samuel Pepys</i> (London, 1976)
<i>Roxburghe</i>	W. Chappell, W. and J. W. Ebsworth (eds.), <i>The Roxburghe Ballads</i> (London and Hertford, 1871-95)
Shepard, <i>Meanings of Manhood</i>	A. Shepard, <i>Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England</i> (Oxford, 2003)
Walker, <i>Crime</i>	G. Walker, <i>Crime, Gender and the Social Order in Early Modern England</i> (Cambridge, 2003)

Introduction

She is a builder of her selfe, of a good name, which is a rare monument, better to be sought than great riches.¹

City wives and wenches are so common

He thinks it hard to find an honest woman.²

In 1620 the pamphleteer Christopher Newstead wrote a defence of women in which he complained that his contemporaries were 'Eagle-eyed in espying their faults, but dark sighted Owles, in perceiving their virtues'.³ Historians have been guilty also of studying whores and scolds instead of women of honest life and conversation. One of the significant findings to emerge from the conference on 'Honour and Reputation in Early Modern England' held at the University of Cambridge in 1995 was that female dishonour had received more attention than female honour, with undue attention paid to chastity and sexual transgression.⁴ This thesis seeks to fill this gap in the existing scholarship by exploring forms of behaviour other than the purely sexual that brought honour and dishonour to lower and middling sort women in early modern London, and examining areas over which contemporaries disagreed. Chastity was a prerequisite for a woman to avoid dishonour, but women needed to do much more to build good reputations. By examining notions of female honour in prescriptive and literary sources alongside court records this thesis explores popular notions of respectable female behaviour and examines ambiguities and contradictions that faced

¹ W. Crompton, *A Wedding Ring, fitted to the finger of every paire that have or shall meete in the feare of God* (London, 1632), p.10.

² 'The Merry Mans Resolution Or a London Frolick', *Pepys* iii, p.185.

³ C. Newstead, *An Apology for Women: Or, Womens Defence* (London, 1620), p.4.

⁴ The papers given at the conference together with a summary of the closing plenary discussion were published in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 6 (1996).

women seeking to fashion respectable images in the metropolitan environment. In moving away from sexuality the boundaries of honour become blurred, allowing exploration of female agency and negotiation.

Negotiating and fashioning honour

When Christopher Newstead enquired ‘what can be safe to a woman, when shee is bereaved of her chastity?’ he raised a question historians have long sought to answer.⁵ Keith Thomas and Lawrence Stone both argued that the double standard caused male extra-marital sexual relations to be treated as minor offences, whilst restricting female sexual behaviour severely. Husbands enjoyed full sexual rights over their wives and women were expected to be virgins when they married. Men were expected to have acquired sexual experience before marriage, but any woman who lost her virginity before marriage was perceived to have lost her honour, encouraging the notion that prostitutes and ‘fallen women’ were necessary evils. Thomas and Stone added the caveats that church teaching and middling-sort moralists stressed the sinfulness of fornication for both sexes, and suggested the poor adhered to the double standard less rigidly because its prescriptions resulted from concerns about property transmission and lineage. However, neither historian suggested that female honour was defined by anything other than sexual reputation.⁶

The double standard formed the bedrock of a patriarchal system inherited from the medieval period, reinforced by the reiteration of biblical and classical beliefs, the dominance of household families as socio-economic units, guild regulations, child-rearing practices, medical beliefs and the sexual division of labour. This patriarchal

⁵ Newstead, *Apology for Women*, p.13.

⁶ K. Thomas, ‘The Double Standard’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20 (1959), pp.195-216; id., ‘The Puritans and Adultery The Act of 1650 Reconsidered’ in D. Pennington and K. Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford, 1978), pp.261-63; L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Abridged Edition: Harmondsworth, 1979), pp.315-17, 401-02; id, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford, 1990), pp.7, 179-80, 193, 242-44.

system caused women to be excluded from full community participation, clustered them in unskilled, low-paid, and low-status 'female' jobs, and denied them both equal wages and full access to the resources and profits of household economies. Religious, political, and legal reformers questioned the precise nature of the basis for patriarchal authority, but no conscious effort was made by these authors to improve the lives of early modern women, who continued to be treated as lesser human beings.⁷

However, early modern women did not necessarily accept a subordinate role meekly. Based on evidence from misogynist cheap print and drama, and witchcraft and scolding prosecutions, David Underdown argued that Elizabethan and early Stuart England experienced a crisis in gender relations.⁸ However, models of crisis based on scolding proved difficult to substantiate due to problems of measuring the nature and frequency of prosecutions.⁹ Thus, instead of discussing theories of crisis, historians have followed Judith Bennett's suggestion to write histories of patriarchy, describing how women undermined, coped, or survived in systems seeking their subordination.¹⁰ Anthony Fletcher argued that men redefined philosophy, law, theology, and custom to reinforce patriarchal structures for their own benefit, but that patriarchal authority was limited because men were uncertain and uneasy about their abilities to fulfil the dominant gender roles expected of them. Male anxieties concerning female assertiveness and sociability were widespread, stemming from the fact that many women were neither docile nor passive. Moreover, respectable men deemed violence

⁷ J. M. Bennett, 'History that stands still: Women's work in the European Past', *Feminist Studies* 14:2 (Summer 1988), pp.269-83; id., 'Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide' in D. Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1300-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and History* (London, 1992), pp.147-75; M. R. Somerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early-Modern Society* (London, 1995).

⁸ D. Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England' in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.116-36.

⁹ M. Ingram, "'Scolding Women Cucked or Washed": A Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England?' in J. Kermode and G. Walker (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), pp.48-80; M. K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England 1370-1600* (Cambridge 1998), pp.13-14, 73-74; K. Jones and M. Zell, 'Bad conversation? Gender and Social Control in a Kentish borough, c.1450-c.1570', *Continuity and Change* 13:1 (1998), pp.11-31.

¹⁰ J. M. Bennett, 'Feminism and History', *Gender and History* 1:3 (Autumn 1989), pp.251-72.

to be unacceptable and ineffective as a means to control women, ensuring that patriarchal authority was exercised through persuasion and negotiation.¹¹ Susan Amussen also suggested that early modern women were subordinated to a 'limited' degree, since although ideas about sexuality fuelled misogyny and reinforced patriarchy, women also exercised authority in various roles, for example as household managers.¹² Most recently Bernard Capp has explored more fully how middling sort and plebeian women negotiated authority and gained some degree of agency in patriarchal society.¹³ Ordinary women thus made their own history, but within certain limits.

Codes of honour played a large part in defining what those limits were. Elite male concepts of honour were characterised primarily by competitive assertiveness. Such notions assumed situations would occur in which resorting to violence could be justified if conflicts could not be resolved by other means. Individuals had to capture the attention of their peers through wise, pious, or civil actions in order to be accepted into communities of honour that determined their place in the social order. However, honour was being contested constantly, and both individual will and moral autonomy were significant in its definition.¹⁴ To be deemed honest, individuals had to maintain integrity in their relationships with family and neighbours, with themselves, and with God.¹⁵ Relations between individuals and their families and communities were also important for middling sort and plebeian women seeking to be considered honourable. However, although physical appearance, dress, civil sociability, and neighbourliness remained important regardless of gender, sometimes women were judged by different

¹¹ A. Fletcher, 'Men's Dilemma: The Future of Patriarchy in England, 1560-1660', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 4 (1994), pp.64-81; id., *Gender*, pp.3-29.

¹² S. D. Amussen, 'The Gendering of Popular Culture in Early Modern England' in T. Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England, c.1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), p.51.

¹³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*.

¹⁴ M. James, 'English politics and the concept of honour, 1485-1642' in id., *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), pp.308-14.

¹⁵ P. Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), p.139.

criteria from men, for example by their roles as housewives and mothers. Some of these qualities and abilities, such as beauty, dress, and good childcare and housewifery skills inspired 'competitive assertiveness' amongst women in the same way men competed to prove their wealth and physical strength.

The construction of a good reputation was an act of self-fashioning that involved reconciling individual wishes with restrictions imposed by law, religion, family and society. Definitions of honour and self-identities were created from contradictory values circulating in society, mobilised by individuals in acts of self-empowerment.¹⁶ Women fashioned respectable identities by manipulating and deploying the values found in languages, performances, and texts, negotiating within the boundaries of patriarchal discourse the conditions of their subordination. Whilst the boundaries of acceptable behaviour restricted the range of actions available to women, such limits might be beneficial since they offered standards to measure conduct against, enabling ordinary people to hold men and women to account for their actions.¹⁷ The study of honour is thus part of gender history, concerned with 'the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women' and the imposition of social categories on the sexed body. Moreover, while studies of both honour and gender are concerned with sexuality, they encompass other issues such as parenting and work.¹⁸

The contestation of meanings of honour and the desires of ordinary people to maintain good reputations led to numerous defamation and slander suits being brought before the ecclesiastical and secular courts. Such legal actions were triggered

¹⁶ S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London, 1980), pp.1-9; N. Z. Davis, 'Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France' in T. C. Heller, M. Sosna and D. E. Wellbery (eds.), *Reconstructing Individualism and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford, California, 1986), pp.53-63.

¹⁷ M. J. Braddick and J. Walter, 'Introduction. Grids of power: order, hierarchy and subordination in early modern society' in idem. (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.1-42.

¹⁸ J. W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (December 1986), pp.1056-59.

partly by a lack of definition as to where the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour lay. Moralists stressed a need for personal discipline when interacting with the opposite sex, whilst those who took part in ridings, rough music, libels, rumour, and gossip sought to instil a plebeian morality within their communities. However, attempts to delineate precise boundaries of respectability were problematic, for although contemporaries recognised that women needed to be allowed to exercise some degree of agency in everyday life, they were unsure what freedoms to allow for hetero-social interaction in communities where everyday contact between women and men was unavoidable. Unmarried men and women seen or believed to be keeping company by meeting in locked chambers or drinking together were viewed with suspicion, whilst the greater freedoms enjoyed by widows and the frequent physical proximity of maidservants to male householders and their relatives and friends made the behaviour of such women a focus for concern. Female bodies caused anxiety particular amongst men and were frequently associated with filth, beastliness, and disease in defamation. Young single women were watched for the signs of pregnancy that proved they had engaged in illicit sex, and sometimes people even resorted to spying to acquire evidence to present offenders.¹⁹ We should note of course, that female bodies were not always denigrated, and the beauty of women was praised by numerous poets, balladeers, husbands, and sweethearts.

The work of Laura Gowing has emphasised how defamation and attempts by ordinary people to police neighbourhood morality focussed predominantly on sexual behaviour. Gowing has also shown how such records reveal that early modern society was concerned not just with female sexuality, but with how illicit sex manifested itself in social relations and on the body. In her pioneering and highly influential work,

¹⁹ M. Ingram, *Church Courts Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.155-66, 225-30, 240-45, 259-61, 292-319; id., 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England' in B. Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1985), pp.166-97; id., 'Ridings, Rough Music and the "Reform of Popular Culture" in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 105 (November 1984), pp.79-113.

Gowing argued that the word 'whore' condemned unchaste women and reinforced beliefs about female bodies, sex, and gender roles within marriage that emphasised the incomparability of the sexes. However, the ideology of sexual passivity that was synonymous with chastity was impractical and often undesired by ordinary women, who sought to avoid being labelled dishonest by creating a cultural construction of the whore built around her consumption, clothes, body, the places she frequented, and the household and neighbourhood disruptions she caused. Defining the whore as the stereotype of female misbehaviour in order to delineate boundaries of repute resulted in discussions of female honour being extended beyond sex to include other forms of behaviour, showing that women's honour was based on more than the double standard.²⁰

Equations of female honour with virginity and chastity have been complicated further by developments in the history of masculinity, many written in response to Gowing. The reputations of men from the middling sorts and the 'honest' poor were defined by their sexual behaviour, socio-political authority and economic credibility. Age and marital status acted as variables. Some young, single men might boast of their sexual promiscuity among their peers to gain approval and acceptance, though their marriage and employment prospects were adversely affected if such tales spread outside environments such as alehouses. By contrast respectable married men were expected to be faithful to their wives, and to protect the sexual honour of their daughters and female servants, since the sexual behaviour of these women impacted on their own honour. Men were anxious that the women they married should be virgins, and husbands feared they would be cuckolded if they were unable to sexually

²⁰ L. Gowing, 'Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London', *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (Spring 1993), pp.1-21; id., 'Language, power and the law: women's slander litigation in early modern London' in J. Kermode and G. Walker (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), pp.26-47; id., *Domestic Dangers*, pp.1-8; id., 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 6 (1996), pp.225-34.

satisfy their wives. Moreover, men who consorted with whores and prostitutes risked having their reputations besmirched and being blackmailed. However, although being labelled a whoremonger or bastard-getter could damage male sexual reputations, it was often the economic and physical consequences of illicit sex that harmed male honour, rather than the connotations of the act itself. Respectable women were often wary of bringing cases against men to court since pushing claims too far or being unsuccessful in bringing a suit could leave women facing malicious gossip, shaming punishments, or violent retaliations by the men they had accused.²¹ Nonetheless, it is now recognised that sexual actions could affect male honour, and historians now need to ask how non-sexual behaviour helped define female respectability.

The terms honour, credit, and reputation will each be used in this thesis when appropriate, but whilst they carried similar meanings, each possessed a distinctive significance. Credit referred to the reputation and standing of an individual, comprising social and economic components, and was assessed through domestic and communal dealings of an individual with her or his relatives, friends and neighbours. Women were involved in networks of exchange wherein goods, services, and money circulated, though they could not access such networks as easily as men. Nonetheless, credit, reputation, 'good name', and 'standing' were used interchangeably to refer to both sexes. Similarly generosity and reliability were praiseworthy qualities regardless of gender.²² Alexandra Shepard has explored how sexual and economic honesty functioned as changeable components in establishing and disputing honour and reputation, and argues that issues of status need to be considered alongside those of

²¹ B. Capp, 'The Double Standard Revisited: Plebeian Women and Male Sexual Reputation in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 162 (February 1999), pp.70-100; id, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.92-103; Foyster, *Manhood*; S. Hindle, 'The shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in early modern England', *Continuity and Change*, 9:3 (1994), pp.391-419; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, pp.120-21, 152-85; D. Turner, "Nothing is so secret but shall be revealed": The Scandalous Life of Robert Foulkes' in T. Hitchcock and M. Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (Harlow, 1999), pp.169-92.

²² M. K. McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.9-12.

gender in order to understand concepts of honour fully. Witnesses in court asserted their honesty by referring to a wider range of behaviour than those which feature in defamatory allegations. By reading for subtler tests of credit in church court records, Shepard argues that historians can gain new insights into honour and reputation, emphasising 'worth' as a component of honour that comprised monetary estimates and ethical attributes, which both women and men drew on to assert their honesty. Honesty involved truthfulness, the diligent pursuit of vocation or office, substance, self-sufficiency, the ability to pay one's debts promptly and fully, avoiding strife with family and neighbours, and remaining within the boundaries of behavioural codes that emphasised chastity, but also sobriety and plain dealing. Age, status, and gender all affected claims to honesty.²³

In discussing credit, reputation, and honour Faramerz Dabhoiwala has argued that all three comprised moral and social factors, and that ideas of honour overlapped with religious ideals and notions of social order. Ideologies of reputation pretended to absolute moral judgements, but in practice subjective social considerations impinged on definitions and ideas of reputation could be manipulated subjectively. Dabhoiwala also argued that chastity was a prerequisite, not a measure of female reputation, and as long as her sexual honesty was not questioned, the honour, reputation, and credit of a woman was linked to her social and economic position. Moreover, when the rhetoric of chastity was invoked it could be used to express opinions about female conduct, appearance, or civility, rather than sexual behaviour.²⁴ Similarly Garthine Walker has stressed that attitudes to female bodies and sexuality constituted merely part of female honour, and that female honour has been imagined primarily in terms of dishonour, in part because of the nature of the sources examined. According to Walker, historians

²³ A. Shepard, 'Honesty, Worth and Gender in Early Modern England, 1560-1640' in H. R. French and J. Barry (eds.), *Identity and Agency in English Society, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp.87-105.

²⁴ F. Dabhoiwala, 'The Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century London', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 6 (1996), pp.201-13.

have neglected personal codes of female honour in favour of exploring social codes, an approach that, she argued, perpetuates gender ideologies and overlooks alternative forms of female honour. This neglect of non-sexual related aspects of female honour has been compounded by the fact that, until recently women's work has been located within a domestic context, whereas honour has been perceived as something acquired, earned, and gained through participation in public affairs. Drawing on the work of anthropologists who worked on Mediterranean societies, Walker defined honour as comprising a sense of self-worth and of being valued by others, and argued that by fulfilling their domestic duties women gained both a social identity and a sense of subjective self-worth.²⁵

The work of Dabhoiwala, Gowing, Shepard, and especially Walker, provides a series of starting points for discussing notions of female honour, reputation, and credit in early modern London. Historians too often consider female sexual behaviour to be the only criterion employed to define women's honour, leading to the belief that women could only construct a good reputation by protecting themselves from sexual predators. This thesis argues that physical beauty and clothing, domestic duties of motherhood, housewifery, and servant management, and the social and economic interactions of women with other Londoners in their local neighbourhoods and the city at large all affected female social identities, self-worth and community status, expanding the boundaries of female honour to argue that virginity and chastity, essentially passive virtues, were not the only criteria used to gauge female reputations. By doing so it argues that, within certain boundaries, the history of female honour can be about what women achieved as well as how they were restricted.

²⁵ G. Walker, 'Expanding the Boundaries of Female Honour in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 6 (1996), pp.235-45.

Experiencing London

There are obvious reasons to choose London as a case study in which to explore ideas of female honour. Urban governments produced voluminous records that can be used to reconstruct women's lives, and histories of early modern women in urban contexts are more likely to reveal alterations in female experiences affected by the social and economic changes of the period.²⁶ Moreover, whilst male anxieties regarding female behaviour were not confined to the metropolis, they may have been more widespread and more deeply felt in the capital because of such historical developments.²⁷ London offered opportunities for employment, consumption, education, and the refashioning of identity that would have been difficult or impossible to achieve in the provinces. Up to a sixth of the population lived in or experienced London directly at some point in their adult lives. Fuelled by migration the London population increased fourfold between 1550 and 1700, whilst its share of the national population rose from four to ten per cent. Only a quarter of the population lived inside the walls, and significant growth occurred mostly in the extramural suburbs and Middlesex.²⁸ People from numerous occupations and social backgrounds lived in close proximity, and within wards and parishes a hierarchy of streets, lanes, yards and alleys existed, many with their own community identities.²⁹ The social horizons of Londoners were primarily locally focussed. Although people moved residence as their economic and lifecycle status changed, they did so within restricted areas.³⁰ Londoners often depended on the support and goodwill of fellow parishioners and company members, and their

²⁶ Bennett, 'History that stands still', p.271.

²⁷ Fletcher, *Gender*, pp.27-28; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.274-75.

²⁸ E. A. Wrigley, 'A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750', *Past and Present*, 37 (July 1967), pp.44-51; R. Finlay and B. Shearer, 'Population Growth and Suburban Expansion' in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1500-1700: The making of the metropolis* (London, 1986), pp.37-59.

²⁹ M. J. Power, 'The social topography of Restoration London' in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1500-1700: The making of the metropolis* (London, 1986), pp.199-223.

³⁰ J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.221-22, 230-31.

collective interactions within these socio-economic units provided them with a sense of identity, access to communal resources, and help in resolving conflicts.³¹

Patriarchal households formed the building blocks of London neighbourhoods. The average household comprised a nuclear family and often at least one servant, and provided its members with security and identity, helping to satisfy their emotional and physical needs, and operating as a unit of residence, consumption and production. Households were not static units and both property and people moved between them, particularly in the capital where lodgers and servants might be residents for short periods of time. When women and men married new households were created, and ideally marriage was to be delayed until couples could afford to establish independent, economically viable households.³² The age at which women in London married was strongly influenced by their socio-economic background, whether their parents were alive, the presence or absence of kin in the capital, and whether a woman was a migrant or a native Londoner. Wealthy London-born women, such as the daughters of rich merchants, married around the age of twenty, whilst women migrating to London often arrived in the capital in their late teens and married around the age of twenty-four. Since men outnumbered women in early seventeenth-century London, women were sent or chose to migrate to the metropolis to increase their chance of finding a husband.³³ Remarriage was common due in part to high mortality rates. Young middling-sort widows often remarried to younger men from the same profession as their deceased husbands, and such women arguably had greater authority than was typical in early modern marriages, although not all widows were

³¹ S. Rappaport, 'Social Structure and Mobility in Sixteenth-Century London: Part II', *London Journal*, 10:2 (1984), pp.113-14; id., *Worlds within Worlds: structures of life in sixteenth-century London* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.201-11, 215-16.

³² M. Chaytor, 'Household and Kinship: Ryton in the late 16th and early 17th centuries', *History Workshop Journal*, 10 (Autumn 1980), pp.25-60; K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London, 1982), pp.66-88.

³³ V. Brodsky Elliott, 'Single Women in the London Marriage Market: Age, Status and Mobility, 1598-1619' in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), pp.81-100.

able to or chose to remarry. Central London households included more lodgers, servants and apprentices than those in the provinces. Family and kin were less likely to live near by and high mortality rates made families less stable and secure.³⁴

Households also operated as political entities. Protestant patriarchal theorists believed that church and society should be ordered by gender and rank, and drew analogies between patriarchal authority in the state and the family, defining middling sort households as foundations of political and social order and 'limited monarchies' with husbands representing God on earth. However, domestic relationships varied and reciprocal duties were expected of husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and servants. Marriages in which wifely deference and obedience were exchanged for protection by the husband provided models for relations between all women and men. Wives were expected to respect and love their husbands and contribute to their household economies through supervising domestic production, selling produce at market, and being thrifty in their provisioning. In return husbands were to respect their wives, recognise their practical and spiritual household roles, consult them, and delegate them authority as mistresses and mothers.³⁵

Women worked outside the household as well. The diverse London economy was based on manufacturing industries and craft guilds, and much employment was casual or seasonal. Trade increased largely within the walls and industry mostly grew in the extramural parishes.³⁶ Theoretically London women enjoyed better economic opportunities than their provincial counterparts. Rights of *femme sole* were extended to *femme coverte* through customary law, enabling wives to acquire and dispose of

³⁴ V. Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations' in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. E. Wrightson (eds.), *The World we have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford, 1986), pp.122-54.

³⁵ C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1964), pp.382-416; S. D. Amussen, 'Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560-1725' in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.196-205; id., *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988), pp.1-3, 34-47.

³⁶ A. L. Beier, 'Engine of Manufacture: the trades of London' in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay (eds.), *London 1500-1700: The making of the metropolis* (London, 1986), pp.141-67.

property and to engage independently in crafts or trades, but generally only widows could practise a craft or trade as most crafts and trades did not permit single women to work for wages.³⁷ However, wives also distributed and produced goods and services to aid their household economies. Women learned about household management by working as domestic servants, and wives were encouraged to gain knowledge about their husbands' businesses so they could assist on a daily basis, or take charge in his absence. Such knowledge could prove especially useful when widows needed to take charge after the death of their spouse. Women might be employed in jobs unrelated to that of the head of the household, and female occupational identities were weak as women's employment was piecemeal, unorganised, untrained, and auxiliary. Women worked in victualling and clothing trades, sold goods in shops and at markets, baked, took in washing, acted as wet-nurses and midwives, ran lodging houses, and operated as money-lenders. The desperate relied on charity and relief, turned to pawnshops, or resorted to crime or prostitution.³⁸

Recent histories of London have moved beyond discussing crisis or stability, focusing on relationships and experiences of ordinary Londoners instead.³⁹ Partly this entails examining community relations, including neighbourly sociability. Historians have been re-conceptualising community in terms of interpersonal relations, and have suggested that people were connected with numerous groups simultaneously, though over the course of the lifecycle these groups would change.⁴⁰ Such ideas co-exist well with existing work on early modern London neighbourhoods. Although London was a city of migrants, neighbourliness remained important to middling-sort Londoners, and manifested itself through daily social interactions in their homes, as well as in

³⁷ Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, pp. 37-41; Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.158-60.

³⁸ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.160-74; id., *City Full of People*, pp.107-155; Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London', pp.140-42; Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, pp.81-91.

³⁹ P. Griffiths and M. Jenner, 'Introduction' in idem. (eds.), *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), pp.4-5.

⁴⁰ A. Shepard and P. Withington, 'Introduction' in idem. (eds.), *Communities in early modern England* (Manchester, 2000), p.5.

shops, churches, streets, public houses, and from the later seventeenth century, coffeehouses. However, these ties were put at risk when neighbours became inquisitive about the behaviour of others which could easily lead to confrontations.⁴¹ When such conflicts occurred, Londoners resorted to parish clergy, neighbours, landlords, and vestrymen, or to the wardmotes, companies, aldermen and their deputies to resolve them. However, although distinct communities existed within wards, parishes, streets and alleys, many people nonetheless lacked a sense of belonging within these overlapping metropolitan worlds, and divisions existed within local communities based on wealth, occupation, religion, length of residence and sexual behaviour.⁴²

Chronologically the period examined in this thesis covers the second half of the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century, from the outset of the Elizabethan era to the Glorious Revolution. The adoption of this timeframe should not be read as support for the claim of David Cressy that social history 'cannot be written without the traditionally dominant framework of politics and religion'⁴³ However, it is to take on board the important point raised by Muriel McClendon and Joseph Ward, that the ability to fashion individual self-identities was affected by post-Reformation social upheavals and religious changes.⁴⁴ Since all the sources utilised in this thesis were to some degree influenced by Protestantism of one variety or another, to begin with the Act of Uniformity makes sense. Similarly, the Glorious Revolution heralded not just a change of monarch, but a host of new attitudes to patriarchy and moral reform. All

⁴¹ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.240-48.

⁴² I. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.61-62, 79-98.

⁴³ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), pp.9-10.

⁴⁴ M. C. McClendon and J. P. Ward, 'Introduction' in M. C. McClendon, J. P. Ward and M. MacDonald (eds.), *Protestant Identities: Religion, Society, and Self-Fashioning in Post-Reformation England* (Stanford, California, 1999), p.12.

chronological breaks are in some way artificial, but hopefully readers will appreciate the logic of those selected on this occasion.

Weaving identities

Reconstructing the lives of early modern women has always been a difficult task. The pamphleteer Ester Sowernam sought to use evidence from ‘authorities, customes, and daily experiences’ to ‘deliver of what estimate women have been valued in all ancient and moderne times’.⁴⁵ The aims of historians and the sources available have altered little over the intervening centuries. This thesis draws on material that falls within four broad categories: conduct literature, legal records, cheap print, and drama. Ideas about female honour circulating amongst the plebeian and middling sorts were shaped by what people heard in church and were told in court, but such judgements were also influenced by recreational pursuits, such as drinking in alehouses, listening to ballads, libels and other tales, and going to playhouses. These cultural media shaped opinion, but were not part of the authoritative canons of church and state. By utilising various sources this thesis locates itself within established methodologies used in the writing women’s and gender history. Judith Bennett noted that ‘patriarchy was not rooted in any single cause; it was everywhere’.⁴⁶ Acknowledging this truism, historians must use as wide a range of sources as possible to write about the impact of patriarchy on the lives of women and men. Amanda Vickery advised that “‘intertextuality” must be researched, not simply asserted in the abstract’ and subsequent histories have heeded her advice.⁴⁷ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford explained that one of their aims when writing their study of early modern women was ‘to open up the range of source

⁴⁵ E. Sowernam, *Ester hath hang’d Haman: Or An Answere to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignment of Women* (London, 1617), Sig. A2v.

⁴⁶ J. M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters: Women’s Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford, 1996), p.154.

⁴⁷ A. Vickery, ‘Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women’s history’ in P. Sharpe (ed.), *Women’s Work: The English Experience 1650-1914* (London, 1998), p.322.

materials about women and to demonstrate their possibilities within case studies. Every piece of evidence provides a partial access to women's lives; frequently one document is illuminated by another type of source.⁴⁸ Moreover, when examining diverse sources historians must not privilege certain material. Writing social history 'is not a question of devaluing different types of sources, but of exploring the points of contact between them'.⁴⁹ New Historicism has taught historians that history and literature created each other, and that differences between authors highlight tensions and unease about how and if ideals could be achieved.⁵⁰ Comparing and contrasting diverse sources thus enables a greater understanding of the ways in which concepts of honour were negotiated in early modern London.

Household conduct manuals, sermons, and homilies discussed domestic roles women and men were expected to fulfil, and have been rightly criticised as unreliable guides to experiences, although to what extent they described universally-held ideals remains open to question. Many of the authors were university-educated clergymen who subscribed to the hotter sort of Protestantism and most conduct books began as marriage sermons. Such literature drew on classical and biblical patriarchal ideas to promote reformation within the household in order to reinforce patriarchal authority, and was aimed at the urban middling sorts, reflected by the cost and the references on how to manage servants that suggest the authors assumed wives would not need to contribute to their household economies. Authors stressed similar basic points about choosing a spouse, marital love and affection, sharing goods, and fulfilling reciprocal responsibilities for the good of the household. Yet the boundaries of female agency and acceptable behaviour were unclear and much advice was either unachievable or contradictory.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.9.

⁴⁹ Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p.174.

⁵⁰ Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.14-16.

⁵¹ K. M. Davies, 'The sacred condition of equality – how original were Puritan doctrines of marriage', *Social History*, 5 (May 1977), pp.563-80; id. 'Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage'

In the preface to his conduct book William Gouge told his readers how he had ‘preached in your hearing and published in your name these duties’, assuming that his London parishioners would rush to his sermons in printed form.⁵² Whether they did is unknown, but some evidence exists of the readership of conduct literature. Nehemiah Wallington purchased Gouge’s *Of Domesticall Duties* shortly after marrying to ensure everyone in his London household knew their correct role and could honour God in the right manner. Gouge’s book appears also to have inspired Wallington to compile the thirty-one articles that he made everyone in his household sign as an intended step towards starting a domestic reformation.⁵³ By contrast Lady Sarah Cowper used conduct books as a means of empowerment, noting their frequent emphasis on mutual responsibilities and adapting and sometimes ignoring their precepts in order to justify her reactions to what she considered to be unacceptable behaviour by her husband. Sarah realised the conduct book ideals did not match her marital experiences, and she felt she was being denied the respect and authority she was entitled. Sarah sought to assert her moral superiority over her husband by seeking to be a good mother, wife and mistress. Her attitude to married life and prescriptive literature was distinctive, possibly unique, but Sarah’s behaviour reveals that some women could empower themselves by using the hegemonic discourse itself.⁵⁴ Her actions suggest that ‘we should not presume without evidence that women (or men) mindlessly absorbed a particular didactic lesson like so many pieces of blotting paper’.⁵⁵ Moreover they reveal that although ‘there was nothing women could do in this society, to resist the

in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), pp.58-80; A. Fletcher, ‘The Protestant idea of marriage in early modern England’ in A. Fletcher and P. Roberts (ed.), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.161-181; A. Wall, *Power and Protest in England 1525-1640* (London, 2000), pp.81-96.

⁵² W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), Sig. ¶3r.

⁵³ P. Seaver, *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, 1985), p.79.

⁵⁴ A. Kugler, ‘Constructing Wifely Identity: Prescription and Practice in the Life of Lady Sarah Cowper’, *Journal of British Studies*, 40:3 (July 2001), pp.291-323. I would like to thank Professor Margot Finn for bringing this article to my attention.

⁵⁵ Vickery, ‘Golden age to separate spheres’, p.317.

way men insisted upon reading them ... there was much they could do about using those readings to their own advantage'.⁵⁶

Church court records have proved valuable for exploring concepts of honour and morality circulating amongst ordinary people. London church courts fell under the jurisdiction of the province of Canterbury, which included the prerogative court of Canterbury, the court of arches, and the court of audience. The key units of ecclesiastical administration were Episcopal dioceses, wherein the most important forum was the bishop's consistory court. Dioceses themselves contained archdeaconries, and the relationship between and responsibilities of Episcopal and archidiaconal courts varied. Elizabethan and early Stuart church law had its origins in pre-Reformation ecclesiastical law, but was modified gradually during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Three main categories of business existed. Record or non-contentious business comprised the granting of marriage licenses, probates and administrations. Office cases primarily involved disciplinary matters regarding drunkenness, gaming, scolding, sexual offences, swearing, and usury, and were usually initiated by a judge after he was notified through presentments by court officers, parish ministers, churchwardens or their deputies. Instance litigation was initiated by individuals who believed they had in some way been wronged, such as pregnant single women seeking to establish paternity, and victims of defamation. Instance cases and office cases brought by someone other than a judge began with 'contestation of suit' when the statement of the case was presented. This was followed by 'probation' when witnesses were presented, compurgators called, and additional evidence presented, before the judge concluded the case and assigned a date for passing sentence. However, due to lack of evidence, mediation, arbitration, expense, or simply change of heart, few cases were prosecuted to finish. Moreover,

⁵⁶ Fletcher, *Gender*, p.123.

boundaries between the two sorts of business blurred, especially in cases of defamation or matrimonial disputes which might fall under either category. Those appearing in court as accusers, compurgators, defendants, suitors and witnesses were asked whether it was widely believed that a defendant was guilty. Offenders were punished with public penance and threatened with excommunication to ensure attendance and obedience, although the latter was often reserved to allow time for the offender to comply. Whilst not entirely free from corruption, the church courts were efficient by the standards of the time. Rather than seeking to exact retribution for injured parties, ecclesiastical law aimed to reform culprits and to restore social and spiritual harmony. As few people wanted moral discipline by public authorities to be abolished, the values and ideals of ecclesiastical law overlapped significantly with those of ordinary people. However, the letter of the law was often subordinated to the needs and desires of local communities, and church courts faced particular challenges in crowded and impoverished urban areas containing large numbers of young people who were constantly on the move.⁵⁷

The diocese of London contained the lower commissary, consistory, and archdeaconry courts, the latter two of which were thriving up until 1641. Defamation cases accounted for a third of business in the 1590s, increasing to three-quarters by the 1630s. Numbers of female litigants nearly tripled, in some dockside parishes of east London accounting for up to eighty-six per cent of litigants, although women acted as witnesses more rarely than men and their credibility was often called into question. Women in court tended to work in, or had husbands working in, trades and crafts, and female servants also appeared in large numbers. Women used familiar idioms to fashion narratives that reflected their personal concerns, but their statements were also determined by the context of the courtroom and had to be compatible with

⁵⁷ Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp.1-15, 27-69, 323-63.

contemporary expectations. Cases thus relied on interpretations and dealt with issues, sometimes indirectly, that lacked definitive answers. Witnesses placed defamatory words within contexts of marriage, family, and neighbourhood, and their statements explore notions of female honour beyond the purely sexual.⁵⁸

However, court records do not give historians unmediated access to women's thoughts and voices. The words used in depositions were considered carefully, and deployed to prove a point, provide evidence, or conform to a certain linguistic style. Individuals came to court with pre-prepared stories about events they had witnessed and that they had discussed before with friends, neighbours and kin. References to specific people, places, movements and gestures were selectively deployed to give concreteness and credibility to stories and justify the actions of the participants.⁵⁹ Defamation litigation is also an unreliable guide to definitions of honesty since allegations of dishonesty did not necessarily mirror images of positive concepts of honesty. Examining evidence from the church courts has led historians to focus on the importance of female sexual honour at the expense of other aspects of reputation. Since the church courts dealt only with offences prosecutable under ecclesiastical law, defamation litigation was restricted to accusations relating mostly to sexual offences, as other slanders would have appeared before the secular courts. The terms in which reputation was contested before the church courts were thus not directly indicative of general preoccupations, but were defined instead by the legal context.⁶⁰

In an attempt to broaden the focus the thesis draws on the Bridewell Hospital court books and the proceedings of the Old Bailey. Several hospitals were founded in mid-sixteenth century London in an attempt by godly reformers to deal with the problems of poverty. The primary aim of Bridewell was to discipline the unemployed

⁵⁸ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.30-58.

⁵⁹ N. Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: pardon tales and their tellers in sixteenth-century France* (Stanford, 1987), pp.4, 44-45.

⁶⁰ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, pp.114-15; Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp.296-301.

and work-shy of the capital. By incarcerating offenders, setting them to work, forcing them to attend religious services within the precincts, and disciplining those who broke the rules of the hospital, the Bridewell authorities sought to reform the bodies and minds of the inmates. The foundation of Bridewell thus widened the involvement of secular authority in the moral discipline of the capital, although the jurisdiction of the hospital was uncertain and contested. Sometimes governors focused on sexual offenders as heavily as the church courts, and the people brought before the Bridewell were almost always condemned as disreputable. As the sorts of people subjected to social discipline narrowed, vagrancy came to be prosecuted increasingly by the start of the seventeenth century. However, the range of offences punishable by the Bridewell was much wider than that of the church courts, and as the institution was driven by reforming zeal its records are useful in gaining access to ideas of honour. Often women were brought into the hospital for sex-related offences, for keeping disorderly public houses or lodging houses, and for petty crimes and vagrancy. However, sometimes women were specifically targeted by the Bridewell authorities. In the late 1570s the governors attempted to crack down on prostitution, albeit with limited success, whilst from the 1630s nightwalking became a distinctively female offence in the capital.⁶¹ There is thus much to be gained from utilising the Bridewell court books.

The proceedings of Old Bailey trials provide a third type of court record. In a literary market where sensationalism ensured sales it was the authenticity of the proceedings that ensured they enjoyed a wide readership. However, the earlier proceedings on which this thesis draws extensively are often brief or incomplete descriptions of the details of the cases and of what was said in court. Witness

⁶¹ Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*, pp.154-56, 204-15, 231-33, 238-41, 250-54; P. Griffiths, 'The structure of prostitution in Elizabethan London', *Continuity and Change* 8:1 (1993), pp.41-43; id., 'Meanings of Nightwalking in Early Modern England', *Seventeenth Century*, 13:2 (Autumn 1998), pp.213-38. For studies that use the Bridewell court books extensively see Capp, *When Gossips Meet*; Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*; and Paul Griffiths' forthcoming monograph on the Bridewell hospital.

testimonies and particularly statements by the defence were often subject to extensive editing, and much specialised legal language was also omitted.⁶² However, despite these limitations, the accuracy of what can be gleaned from the proceedings, together with the fact that they enjoyed a wide ranging audience ensures their utility as a useful source for middling sort and plebeian mentalities and behaviour.

Cheap print provides another guide to ideas of acceptable female behaviour. Such texts were published in increasing numbers in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Light and sensational in tone and simple in style, they provided a mixture of escapism and godly moralising for readers from various social echelons. Costing between a penny and sixpence they could be bought from bookshops, street-sellers and hawkers. Publishers issued different versions of texts in various sizes and prices, with and without images, to target specific types of readers. Bawdy tales of sexually dominant women, cookery and receipt books, courtship narratives, letter-writing manuals, and books on etiquette may have appealed particularly to women.⁶³

Rates of literacy were higher in London than anywhere else in early modern England, and ideas circulated within overlapping oral, manuscript, and print cultures. Literacy was becoming increasingly important for those aspiring to positions of office and authority, but many people did not require literacy skills on an everyday basis. However, even the illiterate absorbed ideas from texts, albeit mediated through others or at several removes. No one in London lived far from someone who could read a printed or manuscript text, and reading aloud was common practice. Printed items with visual images were pasted on walls of domestic and public spaces, whilst songs, jokes, news and opinions circulated in domestic, recreational, and work environments.

⁶² For the value of the proceedings as historical sources and an extensive bibliography on early modern crime see <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/proceedings/value.html>.

⁶³ M. Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.59-64, 67-72, 111-261; B. Capp, 'Popular Literature' in B. Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1985), pp.198-243; T. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1560-1640* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 96-104, 140-150, 221-24, 257-306.

Ballads and jests were incorporated in street and theatre performances, many of which were memorised by ordinary people. Written words thus permeated the mentalities of ordinary people, providing them with images and ideas they could fashion for their own ends.⁶⁴

City drama offers another valuable, but under-utilised source for historians of women and gender. Problems exist in seeking to ascertain how audiences viewed what they saw on stage, and how printed texts of plays differ from their performances. Audiences responded collectively and vocally to what they saw on stage, getting to their feet to express their feelings, and sometimes hurling missiles. It was sometimes alleged that only disreputable women visited theatres. Whores, pickpockets and assorted individuals of ill repute frequented playhouses, whilst apprentice riots occurred outside theatres in the 1580s and later. Despite such negative connotations women from various social backgrounds went to playhouses regularly. If they went in groups or with their husbands their presence in theatres was not especially problematic, and evidence survives of women visiting the Blackfriars, the Cockpit, the Fortune, and the Globe. However, although theatres became more comfortable places for women, beliefs that women in playhouses were whores died hard.⁶⁵

Cultural representations of disorderly women varied, and regardless of whether or not they depicted actual female actions they could have triggered various responses. They may have served to exorcise male fears, warned women against indulging in such behaviour, or provided women with an imaginary sense of empowerment to compensate for their actual subjugation.⁶⁶ Beautiful young women in godly ballads were either paragons of virtue, inconstant and deceitful, or

⁶⁴ A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000), pp.1-50; Spufford, *Small Books*, pp.1-18; Watt, *Cheap Print*, pp. 1-38, 193-96, 321-32.

⁶⁵ A. Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Third Edition: Cambridge, 2004), pp.1-5, 51-57, 66-69, 71-76.

⁶⁶ J. Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville and London, 1992), pp.3-4.

unwittingly caused the destruction of men.⁶⁷ By contrast ballads of disorderly marriages advised couples about how to resolve disagreements, provoked cathartic laughter that released marital tensions in marriages and encouraged conformity to gender norms.⁶⁸ Various texts associated female self-assertion with disobedience, crime and violence.⁶⁹ Jestings texts often depicted women as victims of misogynist humour, but also showed them to be storytellers, satirists, and witty answerers, albeit less frequently.⁷⁰

Feminist historians have been reluctant to engage with plays and cheap print because of the misogynistic content of some of these cultural artefacts. Judith Bennett illustrated how attitudes to female workers in late medieval and early modern England were shaped by cultural representations.⁷¹ Laura Gowing highlighted the problems of utilising literary and dramatic sources as evidence of female experience, arguing that they seem 'to say so much about gender relations' but do so 'often in such predictable ways'. Gowing suggested that combining legal sources with the 'largely misogynistic comments of contemporary male authors' makes for 'an awkward blend' in historical narratives.⁷² However, not all cultural artefacts were misogynistic. Anthony Fletcher suggested that such sources hinted at anxieties about women's energies and initiative and their sexual and verbal power, but that such concerns about female behaviour did not amount to a generalised hatred of women.⁷³ Marjorie McIntosh suggests ballads, plays, and proto-novels provided stereotypical images of certain types of women and

⁶⁷ Watt, *Cheap Print*, pp.117-19.

⁶⁸ E. Foyster, 'A Laughing Matter? Marital Discord and Gender Control in Seventeenth-Century England', *Rural History*, 4:1 (1993), pp.5-21.

⁶⁹ F. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca and London, 1994), p.6.

⁷⁰ P. A. Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London, 2003), pp.2-5.

⁷¹ Bennett, 'Misogyny', pp.166-88.

⁷² L. Gowing, Review of B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), *Reviews in History*
<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/gowingL.html> (27 November 2005).

⁷³ Fletcher, *Gender*, p.27.

reflected male anxieties.⁷⁴ Bernard Capp argues that although ‘many writers were content to recycle stereotypes, many others were perceptive observers of a society they knew at first hand’.⁷⁵ Most sources, both literary and legal, focus on negative aspects of female behaviour and the few that have more positive things to say about women, such as funeral sermons and memoirs, concern mostly elite women. As such, to determine what contemporaries considered to be positive female behaviour, we need to read between the lines and against the grain, tasks that historians of women and gender have long been accustomed to doing.

In seeking to fashion identities people draw on numerous associations, models, identifications and prescriptions, and linked them together in idiosyncratic, culturally bounded ways. The manner in which people combined different elements depended on their individual social relationships, but the elements themselves were drawn from cultural discourses. Cheap print and drama helped people to solidify their identities by providing cultural images for them to think with.⁷⁶ Representations of everyday life had material consequences, both shaping cultural and social practices and being shaped by them. By looking at the discrepancies between cultural sources historians can learn much about the potential for female agency in specific historical contexts.⁷⁷ Early modern ideals of order were conveyed through analogies that were to be found in various discourses. Whilst it remains important to distinguish between discourses since it is when issues transcend form and take multiple meanings that they become of greatest interest, certain issues, such as notions of female honour, transcended forms and intersected genres. Any cultural artefact should therefore be treated by historians as having cultural value and meaning.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ McIntosh, *Working Women*, p.19.

⁷⁵ B. Capp, Author’s Response to L. Gowing, Review of Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, *Reviews in History* <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/cappB.html> (27 November 2005).

⁷⁶ Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power*, p.4.

⁷⁷ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, pp.3-6.

⁷⁸ L. C. Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithica and London, 1994), pp.10-13.

Combining legal, literary and prescriptive sources need not mean establishing a dichotomy between the 'reality' of judicial sources and a culturally imagined world of literature. Such distinctions have been made problematic by conceiving of cultures as represented through texts. Examining literature and drama encourages historians to consider the nature of the society that produced such artefacts. New historicists have promoted the idea that all traces from the past were part of a single historical culture. Authors drew upon the world around them when producing their texts, but could only articulate attitudes and beliefs within the social and cultural boundaries of the period. However, by examining the widest range of sources possible historians are forced to rethink what was possible in past societies. New historicists recognise that drawing various traces together does not necessarily produce a coherent picture, but they argue nonetheless that social energies circulated within past cultures, binding them together and creating conflicts within them.⁷⁹

The notion of weaving together different sources in order to fashion a sense of women's lives in the past seems an appropriate approach for historians of women and gender. Alice Clark described different threads of women's lives being 'inseparably intertwined'.⁸⁰ Natalie Davis claimed 'the simplest little woman could change other people's loves and hates by breaking a thread in her daily spinning'.⁸¹ Martin Ingram wrote of defamation causes as being 'part of the very warp and weft of contemporary society'.⁸² Judith Bennett asserted that the history of female agency consisted of 'new designs embroidered on a cloth of oppression and deprivation'.⁸³ Lena Cowen Orlin argues that needlework was both a means of educating women into the feminine ideal and a universal signifier of that ideal. Needlework was a badge of virtue, a maker of

⁷⁹ C. Gallagher and S. Greenblatt, *Practising New Historicism* (Chicago and London, 2000), pp.7-8, 12-13, 15-16.

⁸⁰ A. Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth-Century* (Third Edition: London, 1992), p.lvi.

⁸¹ Davis, 'Boundaries', p.56.

⁸² Ingram, *Church Courts*, p.292.

⁸³ Bennett, "'History that stands still'", p.280.

her industry, and a means for women to withdraw into themselves and achieve some degree of personal autonomy.⁸⁴ The methodology employed in this thesis mirrors the processes by which women constructed their identities, involving the collection of disparate ideas and blending them into a coherent but vulnerable whole.

Chapter outline

This thesis is divided into three main sections, each containing two chapters. The first section focuses on women as individuals and concerns perceptions of honour relating to women's beauty and clothing. The first chapter deals with female beauty. Recent histories of early modern attitudes to women's bodies have focussed on contemporary ideas about the corporeal inferiority of women, and have emphasised the difficulties of childbirth and dangers of physical abuse and rape. Less attention has been paid to the ways in which women were praised for their beauty and physical attractiveness. What models of beauty did women aspire to and to what extent was it acceptable to use cosmetics to achieve such ideals? How did a woman balance being attractive enough to gain the attention of male suitors and admiration of female peers, whilst avoiding being so sexually provocative in demeanour and appearance that she risked being labelled a whore?

Chapter two looks at a neglected aspect of female honour, how clothes could bring respectability to women. Clothes were some of the most valuable commodities women possessed and were a means to assert female individuality. Both clergy and moralising writers complained that women spent too much money on expensive clothes and either dressed above their status or in a frivolous or sexually provocative manner. However, the same critics told women they needed to dress in a manner that would reflect well on their husbands. In addition, poor, young women with expensive

⁸⁴ L. C. Orlin, 'Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance: Sex, Reputation and Stitchery' in P. Fumerton and S. Hunt (eds.), *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp.183-203.

clothes were viewed with suspicion, as people believed they had bought such garments with profits from selling sex, or had received them in return for sexual favours. Where did the balance lie between women dressing to impress potential husbands and other women, but not dressing in a manner that would be considered disreputable?

Many years ago Alice Clark described how the energies of early modern women were channelled towards 'the spiritual creation of the home and the physical creation of the child'.⁸⁵ The second section discusses female household roles as mothers, housewives, mistresses and servants. Chapter three examines motherhood, something that has tended to be seen as almost universally positive, and the perceived vocation of all early modern women. However, this was only the case if a woman was married and the couple were able to afford to start a family. To what extent did all women aspire to be mothers and was a failure to be able to have children perceived as shameful? Was the wife or husband blamed and what remedies were sought? For couples for whom infertility was not a problem what constituted a desirable number of children? How were mothers to nurture and train their children and what was deemed an appropriate balance between affection and discipline? One aspect of motherhood that has received less attention from historians, with the exception of the work of Elizabeth Foyster, concerns the roles women played in the lives of their adult children.⁸⁶ What kinds of relationship was it appropriate for mothers to have with adult sons or daughters?

Chapter four discusses women's roles as domestic managers and housewives. Prescriptive conduct literature believed a woman's primary duties were to ensure the efficient running of the household as a socio-economic unit in an unequal partnership

⁸⁵ Clark, *Working Life of Women*, p.4.

⁸⁶ E. Foyster, 'Parenting Was for Life, Not Just for Childhood: The Role of Parents in the Married Lives of their Children in Early Modern England', *History*, 86:283 (July 2001).

with her husband. However, the extent of female authority in relation to such matters was not clearly defined. When could a wife complain to her husband about the way the household was being run? When could she use her own initiative or go against her husband's wishes for the good of the household? What tasks did she need to fulfil in order to be an admired and successful housewife, and what form should a relationship take between a mistress and her servants? How was a mistress supposed to balance her obligations of discipline, education and care of her female servants, and what was her role to be in relation to male servants?

The third section examines women in local metropolitan communities and the capital as a whole. Chapter five discusses the problems women faced in attempting to fulfil duties of friendship, charity, and hospitality expected of Christian neighbours seeking to live together in peace and quiet. To participate in civil society women had to socialise with both male and female neighbours, but where did the boundaries lie between behaving in a sociable manner and gadding around with female gossips, and how much time could a woman spend with a man who was neither her husband nor a male relative before suspicions were raised about her behaviour? Issues of hospitality and charity also raised problems. Generosity earned credit for women, but when did it become extravagance? Who should women have offered charity to, and when were they allowed to use their own initiative to make decisions about beneficence? Finally, to what extent could drinking play a part in female sociability?

Chapter six concerns the relationship of women to the unique metropolitan environment of London. What were the connotations of privacy for women and why could it be problematic for them to be enclosed in chambers and rooms? What did Londoners think of women who ventured into public houses, or walked in London's streets and fields? What did different areas of the city mean to women and men, and

how did these moral values vary according to time, company and the reason for a woman's presence?

Garthine Walker's call to write a history of positive notions of plebeian female honour has not yet been answered effectively. The prescribed roles of housewife, mother and neighbour were careers in which the job descriptions were negotiable. Each woman had an individual image of how she wished to display herself, although not all such models were universally accepted. Time, place and location played key roles in determining the boundaries of what women could do without endangering their good name, especially in London, a city characterised both by strict Protestant values and strong social tensions. By looking at these aspects of women's lives, historians can achieve a more rounded impression of how women gained the respect of others and retained the ability to sculpt their own identities in early modern society.

1. Perceptions of Female Beauty

Tis beauty that is a womans golden crown,
Mans conqueresse, and feminine renowne,
Not ioynd with loue, who dare yet euer fold it?
For beauty's cheape, except loues eye behold it.¹

Introduction

In searching for perceptions of the body we have lost historians have rediscovered the meanings early modern people attached to physical human forms. The body was not perceived as merely a corporeal container of an individual soul, but part of the natural world, affecting and affected by society, the environment and the universe, an entity in constant flux to which it was difficult, if not impossible, to assign any definitive meaning.² Bodies were used to judge people, and could undermine rather than secure gender differences and distinctions that were read into them. Ancient medical beliefs conceived of female bodies as imperfect, weak, inferior and passive inversions of the male standard, and humoral theory justified female inferiority in terms of bodily heat, suggesting one sex could change into the other.³ However, on a more everyday basis, sex and gender were constructed through cultural dialogues. People used knowledge from advice books, medical treatises, almanacs, folklore, metaphors, travel stories and jokes to construct ideas about how bodies functioned, notions that were supported and contradicted by their quotidian experiences and observations.⁴

¹ M. R., *The Mothers Counsell Or, Life within Compasse* (London, 1631), p.26.

² B. Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, translated by Thomas Dunlop (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1991), pp.1-12, 104-16.

³ I. Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge, 1980), pp.28-46; T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1990), pp.25-148; Fletcher, *Gender*, pp.30-59.

⁴ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.18-21; Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp.2-6.

Historians and literary scholars have tended to focus on the negative manner in which ideas about the female body were used to denigrate women, justifying their subordination through claims about physical weakness. Female bodies were considered to be leaky, unclean, and grotesque, prone to mother-fits and greensickness that resulted in melancholy and sexual longings, and notions of female sexual carnality circulated widely.⁵ However, women were also perceived as being the softer and fairer sex, vulnerable and in need of male protection. Allegations of physical and mental inferiority were deployed to restrict women's movements and the roles available to them by placing them in patriarchal households. When women were praised it was because they were believed to have transcended their sexual inferiority and adopted male-associated attributes such as courage and rationality. However, there were limits to the female appropriation of male traits, and women were condemned if they behaved in too manly a fashion, for example by wearing male attire such as breeches.⁵

Whilst existing studies have examined how ideas about the body were used to denigrate women, this chapter focuses instead on physical beauty, an attribute for which women were praised, and a prominent theme in ballads, pamphlets, plays, and social commentaries. Constantia Munda claimed that women's 'resplendent rayes of perfect beauty' had always been praised and admired by 'glorious wits'.⁶ *The Good Womans Champion* described an attractive woman as 'the most beautifull and rare peece of Architecture that ever was erected upon the face of the earth'.⁷ However,

⁵ P. Crawford, 'Attitudes to menstruation in seventeenth-century England' and 'Sexual Knowledge in England 1500-1750' in id., *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 2004), pp.19-68; A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: A Women's lot in seventeenth-century England* (London, 1984), pp.3-5; P. Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed' in M. W. Ferguson, M. Qulligan and N. J. Vickers (eds.), *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago and London, 1986), pp.123-42; G. K. Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, (Ithaca, 1993), pp.23-63; Fletcher, *Gender*, pp.60-82; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.21-30; Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp.7-16.

⁶ C. Munda, *The Worming of a mad Dogge, Or a Soppe for Cerberus the Jaylor of Hell* (London, 1617), Sig. Br.

⁷ I. A., *The Good Womans Champion Or, A Defence for the weaker Vessell, being fit for Widdowes, Wives, Maidens, or others to read or heare* (London, 1650), p.2.

beauty was an issue of debate. Although contemporaries often emphasised beauty in describing positive female attributes, clerics and moralising pamphleteers generally disapproved, blaming both women and men for what they perceived as an obsession with the body. Society expected women to be beautiful, but such expectations were problematic for beauty was also connected to the stereotype of the whore, an image constructed around certain behaviours and appearances to create a negative reference point. Whores were alleged to combine sexual allure and availability with marks of physical repulsion, their diseased bodies concealed beneath cosmetics and expensive finery.⁸ In London fashionably beautiful women were often indistinguishable from whores, who concealed their identities with fine clothes and beauty aids.⁹ Notions of female beauty differed between metropolis and provinces, and there was a perception that women in the capital were more beautiful than their rural counterparts. One jest described a countryman visiting London and spying ‘many brave women and other fine Lasses, far surpassing his homely Jone’.¹⁰ Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys were ‘most surprised in the beauty of a plaine girle’ they saw ‘in the little lane going from Redriffe-stairs into the fields, one of the prettiest faces that we ever saw’.¹¹ Yet although city women might be deemed more beautiful, they were also condemned for the pride they took in their appearances. Alexander Niccholes described what would happen when an innocent ‘Countrey Damsell’ who ‘scarce ever thought of so much pride as handsomnesse’ was brought to London. ‘Enter her into that schoole of vanity, set but example before her eyes, shee shall in turn become a new creature’, he warned. ‘She shall have new thoughts, new purposes, and resolutions, and in the end

⁸ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.79-80.

⁹ F. Dabhoiwala, ‘The Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-century England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996), pp.201-02, 207-10.

¹⁰ *Poor Robin’s Jests: Or, the Compleat Jester* (London, 1666), p.40.

¹¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 7 July 1667, viii, p.325.

so shoulder cut her modesty, that she shall not blush to do that unlawfully, which before she was bashfull to thinke on lawfully'.¹²

Physical appearance was therefore of vital importance when it came to judging the reputations and morality of women in London. This chapter argues that physical beauty was a criterion used to judge women, and a means for them to earn praise and respect both from other women and from men. It proceeds to explain why beauty was valued in women, and describes what physical attributes were considered signifiers of female beauty. Finally, it discusses attitudes to the use of cosmetics and other aids to maintain bodily beauty, suggesting that the decision to employ such products could be both detrimental and beneficial to women, and thus a matter of individual conscience.

Beauty as a female virtue

Women used beauty as a means to judge and compare each other, and many competed to be considered more beautiful than their female rivals. Joseph Swetnam described how 'some will brag of the beauty of such a maid, another will vaunt of the brauery of such a woman, that she goeth beyond all the women in the parish' noting that 'women love to be accounted beautifull'.¹³ Barnabe Rich claimed that 'amongst these women that do so much affect this bodily beauty, tell one of them of some other woman that is reputed to be more wise, more modest, or more virtuous then herselfe, alas it is a matter of nothing ... but tell her of another that is reputed to be more beautifull, more faire, or better favoured then herself, this is a heavy crosse indeed, ynough to make her sicke, and keepe her chamber'.¹⁴ Samuel Pepys observed that when Mrs Pierce looked 'gallant' it put the other young women in her presence 'quite out of courage', but recorded that when his wife, Elizabeth, and his Aunt Wright saw Mrs Batelier a

¹² A. Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving* (London, 1615), p.20.

¹³ J. Swetnam, *The Araignment of lewd, idle forward and unconstant women* (London, 1615), pp.18, 50.

¹⁴ B. Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse* (London, 1616), p.42.

few years later they considered her to be even prettier.¹⁵ Ballads depicted women who surpassed their female neighbours in beauty, or boasted they were ‘as handsome as Bridget or Nell’.¹⁶ One heroine even compared herself to the Queen of May, painting and powdering her face, and displaying her top-knot hairstyle proudly, believing that no other city girl could compare with her beauty.¹⁷ Lorna Weatherill revealed that the inventories of female-headed households were more likely to include looking glasses, suggesting that women possessed greater self-awareness, and were more concerned with individuality and physical appearance than men.¹⁸ Yet not all women valued physical beauty so highly. Katherine Bettergh was concerned that she ‘delighted too much in her selfe, and her beautie’. At the age of thirty-eight Katherine Austen described her body as ‘the worst part of me’, and claimed that the body of ‘every servant maid and country wench may excel mine, and can give the same satisfaction as mine’. Instead Katherine valued the ‘virtues and quality’ of her soul, and wished that ‘if anything in me is to be loved, I hope ’tis my mind’.¹⁹ Beauty was thus important to women, but the extent to which women felt they should prioritise their physical appearance varied.

Some moralists and clerics praised female beauty, but in doing so emphasised that physical appearance ought to reflect inward virtues and piety. Robert Cleaver believed that ‘an honest woman dwelleth at the sign of an honest countenance: which may fitlie bee compared to the gate of the Temple, that was called Beautifull: shewing that if the entrie be so beautifull, within is great beautie’. This beautiful female body had to be practical, ‘of right forme and shape, meete and of strength to beare children,

¹⁵ Pepys, *Diary*, 26 January 1660, i, p.29; 28 May 1666, vii, p.135.

¹⁶ ‘The Lovers Joy and Grief, Or, A Young-mans Relation in a pittiful fashion’, *Pepys* iii, p.345; ‘Joan’s Loving Letter, Containing her Invitation of lusty Roger’, *Pepys* iii, p.270.

¹⁷ ‘The London Lasses Lamentation: Or, Her Fear She should never be Married’, *Pepys* iii, p.239.

¹⁸ L. Weatherill, ‘A Possession of One’s Own: Women and Consumer behaviour in England, 1660-1740’, *Journal of British Studies*, 25:2 (April 1986), pp.143-44.

¹⁹ *The Christian Life and Death of Mistris Katherin Bettergh* (London, 1612), Sig. A4v; BL, Add.. MS 4454 in P. Crawford and L. Gowing (eds.), *Women’s Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 2000), p.184.

and to keepe and govern a house...one as both the man and woman can finde in their hearts unfainedly to love above all other, and to be content withall'. However, beauty could also be 'a prouocation to much euill', encouraging pride in women and 'filthie love' in men. Cleaver claimed that there was 'no man so far without witte, that had not rather have her which is foule and hard favoured, but yet is honest and vertuous', and that 'wee do not intitle honourable to such as bee only beautifull, comely of face, of gentilitie, of comely personage'. Instead he argued that the good Christian husband ought to love his wife for her 'shamefastnesse, modestie, chastity, diligence, patience, faithfulness, temperance [and] secrecie'.²⁰

Other clerics adopted similar stances. William Crompton believed that men were deceived who 'thinke women as they seeme to be, perfect for parts, beautifull, healthie, sober, chaste, temperate' and warned they would 'be ensnared with the very outward favour' if they made 'sense the guide unto reason, and beautie the ground of their affection'. Crompton considered beauty commendable 'when it meets with a gracious heart' and that it was 'given to good ones, lest it should be thought evill; given to the wicked, lest it should be esteem'd more than is meete: yet in both it is truely said to be vanitie: unprofitable and soone fading'. 'Faire ones may be favoured of some for a time; good ones shall be favoured of all for ever' he noted.²¹ Daniel Rogers believed female beauty did not 'reach beyond that is in her', and warned that 'many a woman of exquisite beauty and person' lacked 'inward wit, wisdom and abilities'.²² William Hill argued that women should consider the body to be 'a base Countrey Churl' whilst the soul was 'a very great Lord'.²³

Several writers described beautiful women as having been favoured by God. Barnabe Rich considered beauty to be 'a blessing to a woman' which displayed 'the

²⁰ R. Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1598), pp.105, 144-45, 171-72.

²¹ W. Crompton, *A Lasting Jewel for Religious Women* (London, 1630), pp.7, 9.

²² D. Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour: Or, The Mutuall Crowne and Comfort of Godly, Loyall and Chaste Marriage* (London, 1642), pp.44, 149.

²³ W. Hill, *A New-Years-Gift For Women* (London, 1659), p.33.

Maiesty of the creator' and that helped Christians contemplate 'the inuisible beautie of the almightie God'. However, Rich added a caveat that 'the beautie of the minde' was 'more worth than the beautie of the body, the inuisible of better esteeme then the visible', arguing that a beautiful woman should 'guide her selfe by the zeale of honour and the bridle of shamefastnes, and not to diclare so vnspeakable a treasure with any signes or showes of immodestie'. In the opinion of Rich, a woman neither modest nor bashful was 'naked both in price and honour and is so much the more to be hated and detested'.²⁴ Christopher Newstead considered the female body to be 'full of delights', but warned women that their souls should 'live chaste' and that 'their mindes should be sober, amongst the riotous pleasures of their bodies'.²⁵ According to *The Mothers Counsell* every woman had 'a desire of pleasure bred in the beautie of the body' that competed with 'a good opinion coueting onely good thinges'. The author argued that women were to value their souls as 'a thing beautifull, & immortall, made after the shape of God' and their bodies 'because it is faire, and is the case and sepulchre of the soule, and the nearest seruant of the secret spirit', but added that a woman 'that loveth beautie more than vertue, shall either lack that she coueteth, or els lose what she hath got with great paine'. 'She that is an enemy to beautie is a foe to nature, and shee that doats on beautie is a high traytor to nature', warned the pamphleteer, advising women not 'to excell in beautie, but hold the golden meane'.²⁶

Beauty alone was thus insufficient for a woman to gain a good reputation, and various writers emphasised the ability and willingness to work hard as a quality to be commended in women more than physical beauty. 'If women will be fair let them work' wrote Jane Sharp. 'As it is with the body, so it is with the mind'.²⁷ Henry Peacham cited a Dutch proverb that claimed 'gentility and fair looks buy nothing in the market', and criticised men who married 'a little handsomeness, and eye-pleasing beauty, (which so soon as poverty cometh in at the door, leapeth out at the window)

²⁴ B. Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London, 1615), p.21.

²⁵ C. Newstead, *An Apology for Women: Or, Women's Defence* (London, 1620), p.12.

²⁶ M. R., *Mothers Counsell*, pp.21-22, 24-25.

²⁷ J. Sharp, *The Midwives Book: Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered*, edited by E. Hobby (Oxford, 1999), p.138.

unto very mean and poor kindred.’²⁸ ‘A beautifull woman is for the most part costly and no good huswife’, claimed Joseph Swetnam, arguing that marrying ‘faire lookes without dowrie’ would cause love to ‘soone wax colde’ and citing Solomon’s opinion that ‘a faire woman without discreet manners is like a gold ring in a Swines snowte’. Swetnam warned male readers that ‘if thou marriest for beauty and above thy calling thou must not onely beare with thy wives folly, but with many unhappy words’. His comment that ‘faire women without riches finde more lovers then husbands’ implied that all beautiful women were sexually promiscuous.²⁹ In a similar vein John Taylor recorded a joke about ‘a comely wife, whose beauty and free behaviour did draw her honesty into suspition’.³⁰ *The Mothers Counsell* returned to matters of sexual honour, arguing that neither ‘Beauty, Riches, nor...hie nobility’ were sufficient for a woman ‘to claime the true deserued praise of honor’, and that ‘if chastitie doe faile by her fragilitie...that’s the vertue which defends her honor’.³¹

Playwrights were also dubious about measuring female honour by beauty, and suggested that beautiful women were only worthy of praise when they exhibited other attributes and qualities, including wisdom, discretion, sobriety, and modesty. In *The Alchemist* Surly tells Dame Pliant ‘you’re a handsome woman: would yo’ were wise too’.³² In *Bartholomew Fair* Quarlous describes Grace as ‘discreet, and as sober as she is handsome’.³³ In *The English Traveller* Young Geraldine describes Palestra as both ‘fair and full of all accomplishments’.³⁴ In *Eastward Ho* Touchstone says that although his daughter Mildred is modest and careful, she is neither ‘fair [nor] well-favoured...which modest measure of beauty shall not make it thy only work to watch her, nor sufficient mischance to suspect her’, suggesting that plain or only moderately

²⁸ H. Peacham, *Worth of a Penny: Or, A Caution to Keep Money* (London, 1677), pp.6, 10.

²⁹ Swetnam, *Araignment*, pp.7, 43, 52.

³⁰ J. Taylor, *Wit and Mirth* (London, 1635), jest 51.

³¹ M. R., *Mothers Counsell*, p.5.

³² B. Jonson, *The Alchemist* (London, 1616) IV. vi. 7 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.), *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.453.

³³ B. Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* (London, 1631) I. v. 50 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.), *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.507.

³⁴ T. Heywood, *The English Traveller* (London, 1633), I. i. 101 in P. Merchant (ed.), *Thomas Heywood: Three Marriage Plays* (Manchester and New York, 1996), p.113.

attractive women were less likely to engage in disreputable behaviour.³⁵ Similarly in *The Devil is an Ass* Manly claims that the modesty of Mistress Fitzdottrel ‘seems to suffer with her beauty’, and Wittipol tells Lady Fitzdottrel that he loves her goodness more than her beauty.³⁶ The line between a woman appearing sufficiently beautiful to receive praise, but avoiding being suspected of whoredom because of her beauty was clearly a slender one.

Ester Sowernam responded to such criticism by asking ‘how can beautie hurt? How can it be a cause of a mans ruine, of it selfe?’ ‘Might not a man as easily, and more honestly, when hee seeth a faire woman, which doth make the best use that she can to set out her beautie, rather glorifie God in so beautiful a worke, then infect his soule with so lascivious a thought?’ she enquired. ‘When men complaine of beauty, and say, that womens dressings and attire are provocations to wantonnesse, and baites to allure men, It is a direct meanes to know of what disposition they are’.³⁷ Most men did not ‘complain of beauty’, and despite the cautions of moralists were influenced by a woman’s beauty when considering marriage. ‘O fate, send me a handsome Lasse / that I can fancy well’ implored one balladeer.³⁸ Sir Simonds D’Ewes wrote of how the beauty of Anne Clopton gave him ‘absolute and full content’, describing her as ‘every way so comely’, and claiming that ‘if all the rest had been wanted, [her beauty alone] might have rendered her desirable’.³⁹ Samuel Pepys believed he would easily be able to find a husband for his ex-servant Jane ‘for she is a good natured as well as a well looked girl’, but had concerns about getting a husband for his sister, ‘for she grows old and ugly’.⁴⁰ A beautiful wife was a source of pride for her husband. Pepys was pleased to discover that ‘among all the beauties’ at a wedding Elizabeth ‘was

³⁵ G. Chapman, B. Jonson and J. Marston, *Eastward Ho* (London, 1605), I. ii. 144-47 in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.77.

³⁶ B. Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass* (London, 1631) I. vi. 60; IV. vi. 37-38 in J. Kidnie (ed.), *The Devil is an Ass and Other Plays* (Oxford, 2000), pp.240, 306.

³⁷ E. Sowernam, *Ester hath hang’d Haman: Or An Answer to a lewd Pamphlet, intituled, The Arraignment of Women* (London, 1617), pp.36-38.

³⁸ ‘A Batchelors Resolution’, *Pepys i*, p.232.

³⁹ Citations from L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Abridged Edition, Harmondsworth, 1979), p.132 and R. Huebert, ‘The Gendering of Privacy’, *Seventeenth Century*, 16:1 (Spring 2001), p.48.

⁴⁰ Pepys, *Diary*, 3 September 1664, v, p.260; 10 October 1667, viii, p.471.

thought the greatest'. When Elizabeth was standing next to Princess Henrietta 'with two or three black patches and well dressed' Pepys noted that his wife 'did seem to me much handsomer'. Samuel was also 'not a little proud' when Lord Sandwich enquired of Sir John Mennes; 'what do you think of your neighbour's wife...do you not think he hath a very great beauty to his wife?'⁴¹

Inevitably some men married plain or unattractive wives, and whilst their male friends often sympathised, they could be critical too. The ballad *Man's Felicity and Misery* consisted of a dialogue between two husbands; the first boasted that his wife 'for beauty bears the name, / From all i'th Town whence she came', whilst the second husband bemoaned the ugliness of his wife, alleging her to be 'so loathsome' that 'she every morning makes me spew'.⁴² Some men married women they considered to be beautiful, but that other men regarded less highly. One jest told how:

Poor Robin thinks his Wife excels most Dames,
And calls her Duck and Lamb, with such kind Names;
A Duck's a Fowl, a Lamb's a Beast we know
Poor Robin's Wife's a foul Beast then I trow.⁴³

Samuel Pepys was unhappy about his cousin Roger Pepys marrying Elizabeth Wiles, who he described as being 'an ugly old maid'. Elizabeth was 'a good housewife and discreet woman', allegedly worth two thousand pounds, but Samuel disapproved of the match, claiming 'it hath been the very bad fortune of the Pepyses that ever I knew, never to marry a handsome woman'.⁴⁴ On this occasion at least Pepys believed that physical appearance outweighed other virtues of discretion, hard work, and financial credit. Moreover, family honour was at stake as well as the reputation and personal

⁴¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 10 July 1660, i, p.196; 22 November 1660, i, p.299; 15 June 1663, iv, p.186.

⁴² 'Man's Felicity and Misery', *Pepys* i, p.393.

⁴³ W. Winstanley, *The Delectable History of Poor Robin The Merry Sadler of Waldon* (London, 1680), Sig. A3v-A4r.

⁴⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 29 July 1667, viii, p.365.

happiness of his cousin; beauty, apparently an individual quality, could potentially affect a much wider group of people.

Beauty was not only an asset in attracting suitors and compliments, but could also be advantageous in other contexts. In *The Art of Wheedling* the heroine comes to London 'in hopes that her face would prefer her'.⁴⁵ When Sarah joined his household as a cook-maid, Pepys was unconvinced about her suitability, but as she was 'a good well-looking lass' he allowed her the benefit of the doubt. Samuel was exceptionally vulnerable to the charm of beautiful women. One day as he sat in the dark at the theatre he was spat on by a woman, but as she was 'a very pretty lady' he did not take offence, and convinced himself that it had been an accident. Pepys knew he was susceptible to the allure of beautiful women, especially one woman who sold gloves at the Exchange, and after spending twenty shillings on a pair of gloves as an excuse to spend time in her company, he attempted to justify his expenditure to himself. 'She is so pretty, that, God forgive me I could not think it too much', he wrote. 'It is a strange slavery that I stand in to beauty, that I value nothing near it'.⁴⁶

Pepys was not the only man captivated by female beauty. *The Royal Academy of Complements* offered compliments to be given to 'Ladies, Gentlewomen [and] Maids' such as 'your Beauty is the Conqueress of Man, who is never to be satisfied with the lustre of your Eyes; Fair one, your Feature and Vertues, Excel all mortal sense', and 'I never yet offer'd my affections to any beauty but your own; since then you have the pre-eminence above all others'.⁴⁷ One jest described a mastiff dog attacking a gentleman as he rode past a group of gentlewomen, to whom he shouted, 'this Cur is Hell, and all you Heaven'.⁴⁸ The author of *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* bemoaned how young gentlemen would 'like carl cats in March run

⁴⁵ Cited in Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.183.

⁴⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 10 December 1662, iii, p.279; 28 January 1661, ii, p.25; 6 September 1664, v, pp.261-62.

⁴⁷ *The Royal Academy of Complements* (London, 1687), Sig. A2v.

⁴⁸ *Poor Robin's Jests*, p.125.

mewing and yawling at the doors of young Gentlewomen; and if any of those have but a small matter of more than ordinary beauty, (which perhaps is gotten by the help of a damn'd bewitched pot of paint) she is immediately ador'd like a Saint upon an altar'.⁴⁹ In the sequel the same author noted that some husbands, whilst travelling with beautiful women, would pretend to be bachelors or widowers, and offer to play cards with such women 'that they may the better see what mettle the Lady is made of' before deciding whether or not to attempt to seduce them.⁵⁰ *The Academy of Pleasure* contained the comments of a besotted male telling his lover that he was:

Inslaved by thy smiles
 And thy alluring postures,
 Nor am I weary of thy wiles,
 But dote upon thy gestures.⁵¹

Other male writers took a far more guarded, and often hostile attitude towards female beauty and its effects, warning that women might use their beauty to enslave men and lead them astray, echoing the biblical story of Samson and Delilah. Having a beautiful wife reflected well on a man's reputation, but being captivated by beauty could cause men to lose their self-control and empower women.⁵² Joseph Swetnam and Barnabe Rich wrote at length about the temptations of women they described as 'beautiful harlots', claiming that such women allured men with smiles and amorous glances, using kisses to enflame male passions, and tears to excuse their behaviour.⁵³ Similarly John Wing alleged that 'a little deceitfull favour and vayne beauty...may besott a sensuall foole'.⁵⁴ The author of *The Confession of the New Married Couple*

⁴⁹ A. Marsh, *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage, Relating All the delights and contentments that are mask'd under the bands of Matrimony* (London, 1682), p.3.

⁵⁰ A. Marsh, *The Confession of the New Married Couple, Being the Second Part of the Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (London, 1683), p.61.

⁵¹ *The Academy of Pleasure* (London, 1656), p.91.

⁵² Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.55-58.

⁵³ Swetnam, *Araignment*, p.31; Rich, *Excellency of Good Women*, pp.13-14.

⁵⁴ Wing, *Crowne Conjugall*, p.97.

wrote of how Peggy, a young maidservant, seduced her widowed master by wearing revealing clothes and taking every opportunity to display her legs and bosom to him.⁵⁵ Jest-books and ballads carried similar warnings about being seduced by female beauty. One jest-book conveyed the misogynistic message that 'Women are Wanton, and hold it no sinne, / By tricks and devices to pull a man in.'⁵⁶ A ballad claiming to offer friendly advice described the smiles, winks, and beckoning looks of women as 'vain deceits'.⁵⁷ Another godly ballad warned men not to love a woman 'whose looks can thee allure' as 'in every face where beauty is, the heart's not always pure'.⁵⁸ *Advice to Bachelors* bemoaned how beauty could empower women, and warned young men that:

Beauty's a thing that wins men's hearts,
And reason so bewitches
That men oft let the weaker sort,
Like fools to wear the breeches.⁵⁹

The Description of a Town Miss described adolescent girls and young women in an erotic manner, but also added a dire warning:

At thirteen years Young Ladies are
Contriving tricks to tempt ye,
At sixteen years come if you dare,
You shall have kisses plenty:
At eighteen they are flush of May
Well furnisht to content ye,
At fifteen she would bucking be,

⁵⁵ Marsh, *Confession*, pp.187-88.

⁵⁶ R. Tarlton, *Tarltons Jests* (London, 1628), Sig. Ev-E2r.

⁵⁷ 'A Friends Aduice: In an excellent Ditty, concerning the variable changes in this World', *Pepys i*, p.52.

⁵⁸ 'An Hundred Godly Lessons', *Pepys i*, p.17.

⁵⁹ 'Advice to Batchelors', *Roxburghe ii*, p.376.

But a Devil at one and twenty.⁶⁰

Early modern women regarded physical beauty as praiseworthy and a marker of female respectability, and the manner in which women competed to be considered the most beautiful indicates that the honourable woman was expected to be physically attractive. Moralists argued that beautiful women also needed to have practical skills and inward virtues, the latter supposedly signified by a woman's physical appearance. However, many women and men valued female beauty as an independent criterion of female honour, and allowed looks to override other attributes when assessing women. Many contemporaries were concerned about such attitudes, since if women were able to use their looks to influence male behaviour the patriarchal gender order would be threatened. Such concerns arose in part from suspicions that beautiful women were not always as reputable as their appearances ought to have signified. Although it is difficult to know to what extent the behaviour of men was affected by the influence beautiful women had on them, it can be argued nonetheless that beauty did not only cause women to be praised, but also empowered them to some degree.

Definitions of beauty

The importance of female beauty in early modern culture was therefore universally recognised, even by those who deplored it. But what constituted female beauty, and how far did contemporaries agree on its definitions? One day Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys argued about whether Mrs Pierce was beautiful until both were angry'.⁶¹ Youth was one key element, and bodies of young women and adolescent girls were deemed to epitomise desirability. When dining with John Wright, Samuel Pepys observed that the daughter of Alderman Allen was 'a very pretty lady'.⁶² In 1630 Michael Richards

⁶⁰ 'The Description of a Town Miss', *Pepys* iii, p.57.

⁶¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 5 May 1661, ii, p.94.

⁶² Pepys, *Diary*, 28 February 1660, i, p.71.

defamed Luce Birch by saying that she had asked a sailor if he wanted a wench, and had lifted up her clothes to reveal her naked body, but the sailor rebuffed her, stating that he wanted a younger woman, and Luce allegedly sent her maid to him instead.⁶³

Men often discussed women in environments such as alehouses and taverns.⁶⁴ When Edward Borrowhead took Edward Pew and one of his fellow apprentices to a victualing house in Chancery Lane, Betts the landlord informed them that he ‘had ii or iii pretty wenches’.⁶⁵ Beautiful women could be found throughout London, and Samuel Pepys spent much time observing and looking for them. Samuel recorded how a naval lieutenant and he watched handsome women boarding a ship bound for the East Indies, whilst he and Mr Edward spied ‘many beauties’ in Gray’s Inn Walks. In one of the parks Pepys ‘saw many fine faces and one exceeding handsome’, and on another occasion he walked with Knipp in the New Exchange ‘to see handsome faces, and did see several’.⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly Elizabeth Pepys disapproved of such behaviour, and Samuel recalled that she was very angry when he arrived home late from church, having been walking through the fields on his return journey, as she believed he had been ‘gadding abroad to look after beauties’. Her reprimand had little effect. The following Sunday after service Pepys ‘stood privately at the great doore to gaze upon a pretty lady and from church dogged her home’ to Tower Hill’. Pepys spent much of his time in church observing the female parishioners. In the parish church of St Alsage in Greenwich he saw ‘my fat brown beauty of our parish, the rich merchant’s lady, a very noble woman’. One day when Elizabeth came to his office to inform him that ‘the handsomest woman in England’ would be visiting them, Samuel returned home to find the woman to be ‘the pretty lady of our parish that did heretofore sit on the

⁶³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.67-68.

⁶⁴ Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.41-44.

⁶⁵ Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p.215.

⁶⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 8 April 1660, 17 June 1660, i, pp.105, 176; 18 May 1663, iv, p.142; 27 October 1666, vii, p.344.

other side of our church against our gallery'. On another occasion he entertained himself with his 'perspective glass up and down the church, by which I had the great pleasure of seeing and gazing a great many fine women; and what with that and sleeping, I passed away the time till sermon was done'.⁶⁷

Pretty maidservants often become targets for lecherous patriarchs. Elizabeth Pepys said that her new chambermaid named Mary was 'one of the prettiest that ever she saw in her life', and Pepys claimed his wife was concerned that he would abuse the girl. But Elizabeth had little to fear. When Pepys first met Mary he found her 'a very ordinary wench'.⁶⁸ The incident suggests either that women and men sometimes applied different criteria to define female beauty, or that Elizabeth had been playing a trick on Samuel. One jest described how a master, brought before a JP for getting his maid pregnant, pleaded that it had been the girl who had inveigled her way into his bed. The JP retorted that he should have left the bed immediately. 'Yea (said the Master) would you have done so, if a handsome Maid had come to Bed to you? No I'll warrant ye'.⁶⁹ In 1617 Anne Cole allegedly offered her bachelor master just such a choice when she walked into his bedchamber completely naked, lay in his bed, and told him he was free to do what he wished.⁷⁰ If this account was accurate Anne was not the only woman to expose her body for the pleasure of men. Humfrey Abbot and Ellias Hughes reported that whilst in the house of Mabel Bordman they saw a woman stand by the fire holding her clothes. Mabel asked a man who sat by the fire 'howe hee like[d] her guest and hee sayd well but that she would not take my money; for I offered her xii d and she will not under xviii d'.⁷¹ Yet, even in brothels and bawdy houses, such behaviour was evidently not typical. Simon Warmyllgent told how he

⁶⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 2 October 1664, 9 October 1664, v, pp.286, 292; 3 December 1665, vi, p.316; 29 May 1666, vii, pp.135-36; 26 May 1667, viii, p.236.

⁶⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 20 February 1665, 6 March 1665, vi, pp.40, 51.

⁶⁹ *Poor Robin's Jests*, p.138.

⁷⁰ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.159.

⁷¹ GL MS 33011/5, fo. 18v.

procured Joane Medcalfe to come to his chamber in the Checker in Holborne, 'but when they were there together he mislyked her body and wolde not deal with her'.⁷²

Whilst young women were deemed to be the epitome of beauty, old age was considered to result in a loss of beauty that women may have found difficult to cope with.⁷³ Humoral theory promoted the idea that women's bodies would dry and wither earlier in life than those of men.⁷⁴ Many writers employed similar ideas about decay when discussing the vulnerability and brevity of female beauty. Alexander Niccholes likened beauty to a flower that easily withered, 'of no continuance, for diseases blast it, age devoures it, discontent doth wither it', and warned men not to choose a wife based purely on her physical appearance.⁷⁵ Matthew Griffith claimed that beauty was 'blemished with every breath ... a little cold pinches it, a little heat parches it: it is, at the most, but skinne deepe'.⁷⁶ Thomas Hilder explained that beauty could be lost due to sickness, 'by some accidental blow in the face, by losse of an Eye, by a Canker in the Nose' and warned how 'crookedness may grow in a body formerly straight, such a comely body may come to want a Leg or an Arme, which will be a blemish to it'.⁷⁷ *The Academy of Pleasure* included a letter from a lover to his mistress, warning that 'those Lillies and Roses that Nature has planted in your blooming Cheek will one day fade and wither, your odour and your pretious Colour must yield to time'.⁷⁸ 'As the painting of a ship by weather and by water is washt away, so shall all carnall beautie by sorrow, age and sicknesse, even wither and waste into wrinkles' argued Robert Wilkinson.⁷⁹ Defamation cases recorded women using the term 'old' as an insult,

⁷² GL MS 33011/3, fo. 9r.

⁷³ L. Botelho, 'Old age and menopause in rural women of early modern Suffolk' in L. Botelho and P. Thane (eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), pp.51-59.

⁷⁴ P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford, 2000), pp.21-22.

⁷⁵ Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving*, p.7.

⁷⁶ M. Griffith, *Bethel: Or, A Forme for Families* (London, 1633), pp.249, 251.

⁷⁷ T. Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell: or Seasonable Advice both to Unmarried and Married Persons* (London, 1653), pp.34-35.

⁷⁸ *Academy of Pleasure*, p.28.

⁷⁹ R. Wilkinson, *Merchant Royall* (London, 1613).

combined with accusations of physical decay. Margaret Jones called Elizabeth Merkyn 'old rotten bawde', and Suzan May called Elizabeth Barwicke 'old rotten jade' and 'old rotten Queane'.⁸⁰

Depictions of older women in cheap print were frequently derogatory. John Skelton's poem of Elinor Rumming twisted the traditional descriptive narrative of the beautiful woman to describe the grotesque body of the alewife as 'well worne in age' with a face that 'would asswage a mans courage', and depicted her customers as being equally as ugly.⁸¹ One jest described an old woman 'beholding her self in a Looking-Glass, and spying the Wrinkles in her Face' throwing down the mirror angrily, saying that 'it was strange to see the difference in Glasses: for...I have not look'd in a true one these Seven Years'. Another joke referred to 'an old withered Beldam, in the company of some fine Ladies' as 'a Deaths-head at the end of the Rosary' and a third told of 'a merry Fellow' who asked an old woman when she had sold her Teeth. She castigated him as a rogue, saying 'when I was young I had both Tongue and Teeth, as well as you have', to which the young jester responded 'I believe you very well ... It seems you had too much Tongue, for it hath worn away your Teeth'.⁸² Samuel Pepys described the future wife of his Uncle Fenner in similar derogatory terms as being 'a pitiful, old, ugly ill bread woman in a hatt'.⁸³ Alexander Niccholes summarised such misogynist attitudes in rhyme:

Friends, Souldiers, Women, in their prime
Are like to Dogges in Hunting time:
Occasion, Warres, and Beauty gone,

⁸⁰ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 35r, 121r.

⁸¹ J. Skelton, *Elynor Rummin, The famous Ale-wife of England* (London, 1624), Sig. A4r; J. M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters, Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford, 1996), pp.123-24.

⁸² *London Jests: or A Collection of the Choicest Joques and Repartees, Out of the Most Celebrated Authors Ancient and Modern. With an Addition of above One Hundred Never before Printed* (London, 1685), pp.176-77, 188.

⁸³ Pepys, *Diary*, 19 January 1662, III, 23 January 1662, III, pp.13, 16.

Friends, Souldiers, Women, there are none.⁸⁴

However, age did not wither all women equally. In *The Autumnal* John Donne praised the beauty of his fifty-year-old mistress.⁸⁵ Samuel Pepys considered the wife of Mr Pett to 'hath been handsome, and yet hath a very pretty hand', and described the mother of William Hwer as 'a well-favoured old little woman'.⁸⁶ Displaying a more positive attitude to the aging process Lady Sarah Cowper commented that forty was an age when a woman was 'neither yong enough to be beautifull, nor old enough to be venerable'.⁸⁷ Pregnancy affected a woman's looks in varying ways as well. Pepys thought Mrs Crofts was 'a very pretty woman for a mother of so many children', but remarked of Batelier's wife that 'her great belly...hath spoiled her looks mightily'.⁸⁸

Another common criterion of beauty was features that were considered to be noble, such as a strong nose, and an erect bearing and carriage. In *The Alchemist* Subtle tells Dol to behave 'statelich' in order to deceive Sir Epicure Mammon, and later Sir Epicure himself tells Dol she possesses 'a strange nobility' in her eyes, lips, and chin, resembling those of the 'Austriac princes', and compares her nose and forehead with those of the members of the Valois and Medici families.⁸⁹ In *Mans Felicity and Misery* the happily married man boasts that his wife 'for shape...might a Lady be; / And so all say that doe her see'.⁹⁰ Samuel Pepys believed Margaret Wright had 'the most excellent nose and mouth' and 'the face of a noble Roman lady', and described Mistress Bull as 'my little Roman-nose black girl that is mighty pretty'.⁹¹

Both physical build and complexion were clearly important in defining female beauty. Platonic and Pythagorean concepts of beauty were based on all four humours

⁸⁴ Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving*, p.31

⁸⁵ Thane, *Old Age*, pp.63-64.

⁸⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 14 January 1661, ii, p.13; 21 January 1667, viii, p.24.

⁸⁷ A. Kugler, "'I feel myself decay apace": Old age in the diary of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)' in L. Botelho and P. Thane (eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), p.73.

⁸⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 20 July 1665, vi, p.163; 26 December 1666, vii, p.421.

⁸⁹ Jonson, *Alchemist*, II. iv. 7; IV. i. 54-56, 58-60, pp.401, 432.

⁹⁰ 'Man's Felicity and Misery', *Pepys* i, p.393.

⁹¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 28 May 1666, 1 June 1666, vii, pp.135, 140; 23 January 1667, viii, p.27.

being in balance along with the arrangement of different parts of the body in correct and harmonious proportion.⁹² Sir Robert Filmer claimed that beauty ‘consisteth not so much in partes as in mixture of colours’.⁹³ For William Crompton beauty was both ‘inward of the heart and mind’ and ‘outward in the face and countenance; arising from a pure mixture, and quick motion of the humours’ and Crompton believed that ‘favour may be taken for outward proportion, in bodie, and face; ioyned with a lusty tempered complexion; when all the humours manifest an equal power’.⁹⁴ *The Mother Counsell* defined physical beauty as ‘a seemly compositio[n] of all y[e] members, wherein all the parts with a certain grace agree together’ and deemed beauty to be a divinely bestowed gift that ‘delighteth the eye, contenteth the minde, & winneth good fauour of all men’.⁹⁵ In *The Alchemist* Sir Epicure Mammon tells Dol no one has ‘a more unblamed, a more harmonious feature’ than she.⁹⁶ In *The Devil is an Ass* Pug articulates such ideas with greater simplicity by saying he would note ‘the colour and the size’ of a woman before recommending her as a wife.⁹⁷

Different parts of the female body were considered beautiful, with faces, hair, hands, and breasts receiving particular attention. In the epilogue to *The Roaring Girl* Moll Cutpurse describes a picture of a woman hanging up for sale and how those who looked at the picture argued about the hair, eyebrows, lips, nose, eyes, and cheeks of the woman depicted. The painter noted their criticisms and modified the painting, but the end result was ‘vile’, ‘monstrous’, and ‘ugly’, suggesting the variety of opinions as to what constituted female beauty.⁹⁸ In *Bartholomew Fair* Winwife praises Win Littlewit’s ‘strawberry-breath, cherry-lips, apricot cheeks, and a soft velvet head, like

⁹² U. Eco, *On Beauty* (London, 2004), pp.48, 73.

⁹³ R. Filmer, ‘In Praise of the Vertuous Wife’ in M. Ezell, *The Patriarch’s Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill and London, 1987), p.190.

⁹⁴ Crompton, *A Lasting Jewell*, p.7.

⁹⁵ M. R., *Mothers Counsell*, p.23.

⁹⁶ Jonson, *Alchemist*, IV. i. 75, p.433.

⁹⁷ Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, IV. iv. 231, p.303.

⁹⁸ T. Dekker and T. Middleton, *The Roaring Girl Or Moll Cutpurse* (London, 1611) Epilogue, 1-15 in J. Knowles (ed.) *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.308.

a melicotton', but informs John Littlewit that he prefers 'fruit of a later kind: the sober matron, your wife's mother'.⁹⁹ The manner in which Winwife compares various parts of Win's body with fruit is striking, suggesting her beauty is natural and that she is a young and fertile woman, capable of bearing children. In *The Devil is an Ass* Wittipol praises the 'sister-swelling breasts', 'soft and rosy hand' and 'smooth, round and well-turned chin' of Mistress Fitzdottrel, saying her lips are like 'the banks of love', and singing of her bright eyes and hair, smooth forehead and graceful arched eyebrows.¹⁰⁰

Both women and men focussed their attention on women's breasts, but for quite different reasons. When the aunt of Deb Willett visited Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys she was glad to see that her niece's breasts had started to develop 'she being afeared before that she would have none'.¹⁰¹ Fully developed breasts, together with pubic hair and the onset of menstruation, signified female physical maturity, and were signs that older women looked for in adolescent girls.¹⁰² By contrast men regarded the breasts of women as sexualised body parts, as assets by which they compared and judged female attractiveness. Samuel Pepys described the breasts of his maidservant Mary Mercer as 'the finest that ever I saw in my life' after groping her when she helped him dress one morning.¹⁰³

Pepys was attracted to buxom and curvaceous women. He described the sister of his boy as 'a very pretty woman, and one whom a great belly becomes as well as ever I saw any', and the wife of sheriff Hooker as 'a most beautiful fat woman'.¹⁰⁴ In *Michaelmas Term* Hellgill describes the country wench as being 'young, beautiful and plump; a delicate piece of sin'.¹⁰⁵ However, whilst buxom and plump women might

⁹⁹ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, I. ii. 13-14, 17-18, p.497.

¹⁰⁰ Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, II. vi. 72-73, 84-86, 94-100, pp.263-64.

¹⁰¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 7 December 1667, viii, p.569.

¹⁰² Crawford, 'Attitudes to Menstruation', p.33.

¹⁰³ Pepys, *Diary*, 19 June 1666, vii, p.172.

¹⁰⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 21 December 1665, vi, p.336; 13 February 1666, vii, p.41.

¹⁰⁵ T. Middleton, *Michaelmas Term* (London, 1607), 2:1, 133 in M. Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World, My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), p.85.

be considered attractive, being overweight was problematic, since overeating was associated with fornication.¹⁰⁶ Pepys was disappointed that although Mrs Lane was 'wanton and bucksome' she would 'not venture upon that business', and Thomas Gardner defamed Judith Neale as a 'fat arsed jade and fat arsed whore'.¹⁰⁷

Many contemporary authors believed a slender body was a key determinant of female beauty. Joseph Swetnam believed men preferred a woman 'whose waste is like a wande, or she which hath a spider fingered hand, or she which on her tiptoes still doth stand'.¹⁰⁸ Numerous ballads praise slender women. 'Her middle I can easily span, Shee is the best wife that e're had man' boasted a husband in *Mans Felicity and Misery*.¹⁰⁹ *The Loving Forrester* described an ideal of female beauty based on youth, fairness, and slenderness:

Young and passing faire,
Her body small and tender:
Blith were her looks yellow her locks,
Her fingers long and slender¹¹⁰

A Groats-worth of Mirth for a Penny told how Will the barber fell in love with Joan the miller's daughter because of her ruddy complexion, sparkling eyes and coral lips, and how he admired her hips and slender waist.¹¹¹ Long fingers were considered beautiful, perhaps because they signified delicacy, refinement, and gentility, and suggested the woman concerned was not coarsened by hard work.¹¹² In *The Countrey Lasses Good Counsel* the female narrator described how men praised 'our beauty, with our fingers long and small, Our Leggs and feet, and our bodies withal'.¹¹³ In

¹⁰⁶ Crawford, 'Sexual Knowledge in England', p.57.

¹⁰⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 5 August 1663, iv, p.263; LMA DL/C/235, fo. 248r.

¹⁰⁸ Swetnam, *Araignment*, pp.45-46.

¹⁰⁹ 'Man's Felicity and Misery', *Pepys i*, p.393.

¹¹⁰ 'The Loving Forrester', *Pepys i*, p.326

¹¹¹ 'A Groats-worth of Mirth for a Penny. Or Will the Barber well Fitted for cheating the Millers jolly daughter Ioan of a fat pig', *Pepys iii*, p.207.

¹¹² Eco, *On Beauty*, p.194.

¹¹³ 'The Countrey Lasses Good Counsel', *Pepys iii*, p.20.

Loves up to the Elbowes the woman admired by the balladeer had a 'wast short and body tall and fingers long and small', whilst in *Ione is as good as my lady* the heroine had a slender waist, long fingers, a rolling eye and a nimble tongue.¹¹⁴ The slender build of such women emphasised their youth, another key facet of female beauty.

Slender women were often objectified and sexualised. In *The Damsels Dream* the heroine imagined the hands of her lover around her slender waist, whilst one of Archie Armstrong's jests claimed ladies wanted slender waists so 'their expences may not be too great'.¹¹⁵ Another joke described 'a young lady of singular beauty' being told by 'at your age I could not believe there was any virgin to be found as lusty and as tall as you are'.¹¹⁶ Samuel Pepys described his maid Sarah as being 'a tall and a very well-favoured wench' and thought the youngest daughter of Mr Allen was 'very handsome ... having among other things the best hand that ever I saw'. Whilst dining at a Fleet Street victualling house Samuel commented that the mistress of the house was 'a pretty well-carriaged woman' with 'a fine hand', and he described the sister of Anne Wight as pretty, but 'her hands were not white, nor handsome'. By contrast Pepys considered Mrs Norton to be 'a fine woman, indifferent handsome, [but] good body and hand'.¹¹⁷

The correct body shape had to be combined with the right complexion. Some praised redness in a woman's cheeks, but others favoured pale complexions and white skin. Daniel Rogers deemed a beautiful female face to be one 'wherein you know not whether the white or red be fairer, for both are beauty'.¹¹⁸ The author of *A Discourse of Auxiliary Beauty* explained that 'the looks (you know) of our Sex, as to palenesse

¹¹⁴ 'Loves up to the elbowes', *Pepys* i, p.307; 'Ione is as good as my Lady', *Pepys* i, p.236.

¹¹⁵ 'The Damsels Dream', *Pepys* iii, p.80; A. Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet of Witty Jestes, Rare Fancies and Pleasant Novels* (London, 1665), p.43.

¹¹⁶ *London Jestes*, pp.21-22.

¹¹⁷ *Pepys, Diary*, 28 November 1661, ii, p.222; 9 April 1661, ii, p.68; 20-21 August 1662, iii, pp.172-73; 2 July 1666, vii, pp.190-91.

¹¹⁸ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, p.278.

or rednesse, admit as many changes, as the Moon, by naturall variations'.¹¹⁹ When the heroine of *A Lamentable Ballad of Fair Rosamund* blushed it was 'as though the Lilly and the Rose for mastership did strive'.¹²⁰

When Katherine Stubbes lay sick in bed her husband Philip remembered how her face became 'right fair, red, amiable and lovely'.¹²¹ *The Mothers Counsell* praised 'cheeks of roses, locks of amber' and 'a rosie virtuous cheeke...which all men ioy to touch, all to behold'.¹²² Red cheeks were considered beautiful, but were also associated with blushing, a physical reaction held to signify the inward temperament of an individual. Barnabe Rich described a woman's blushes as being 'an approbation of a chaste and honourable minde, and a manifest signe, that shee doth not approue any intemperate actions, or any other lasciuious speeches, and demeanours that are either offered to herselfe, or to any in her presence'. A woman 'that hath forgotten to blush, it is an argument, shee is past grace, for shamefastnes is not onely a bridle to sinne, but it is likewise the common treasury of feminine vertue'.¹²³

Women who blushed revealed their modesty and respectability. Many ballads showed women blushing if they were offered a proposal of marriage, when they were touched intimately, or when men made sexual advances towards them.¹²⁴ However, women's blushes did not necessarily signify their rejection of men. *The Kind Lady* let her lover into the house at night and 'blushing lay ashamed' when they were locked in a passionate embrace. In *The jealous Lover satisfy'd* the heroine took her lover by the hand, and 'blushing seemed to comply'. Although the heroine of *The Kind Lovers*

¹¹⁹ *A Discourse of Auxiliary Beauty. Or Artificial Hansomenesse. In point of Conscience Between Two Ladies* (London, 1656), p.3.

¹²⁰ 'A Lamentable Ballad of Fair Rosamond, King Henry the Second's Concubine, Who was put to death by Queen Elinor, in Woodstock Bower near Oxford', *Pepys* i, p.498.

¹²¹ P. Stubbes, *A Christall Glasse for Christian Women* (London, 1612), p.8.

¹²² M. R., *Mothers Counsell*, p.26.

¹²³ Rich, *Excellency of Good Women*, pp.22-23.

¹²⁴ 'Cupid's Revenge', *Pepys* iii, p.42; 'Diana's Darling, Or The Modish Courtier', *Pepys* iii, p.230; 'The Gowlin: Or, A Pleasant Fancy for the Spring', *Pepys* iii, p.108; 'Kates Hue-and-Cry after Her Maiden-Head', *Pepys* iii, p.76.

blushed when she caught sight of her beloved, she then requested that he hid under a tree with her to conceal her 'rude blushes' so she could embrace him 'and blush at the Skye'.¹²⁵ The author of *Poor Robins Jests* advised women not to read his book if they had cuckolded their husbands, 'lest they meet with some passages in it, which make them to blush as red, as if they had been drinking of burnt-Claret'.¹²⁶ In all these examples the supposed correlations between outward physical signifiers and inner virtues break down. In *A Woman Killed with Kindness* blushing signifies shame when Anne Frankford bewails:

My fault, I fear, will in my brow be writ.

Women that fall not quite bereft of grace

Have their offences noted in their face.

I blush and am ashamed.

When confronted about her adultery Anne stresses her contrition and asks Acton and Sir Charles, 'Can you not read my fault within my cheek? Is not my crime there?'¹²⁷ In *The Captives* Mildew notes that 'When she but comes in presence she makes blush as if ashamed of what they late had done or are about to do'.¹²⁸

Failure to blush signified female immodesty. In *The English Traveller* Young Geraldine asks 'hath impudence so steeled thy smooth soft skin it cannot blush? Or sin so obdured thy heart it doth not quake and tremble?'¹²⁹ When Ann Symes accused John Lysbe of having 'most shamfully committed carnall copulacon' with her it was noted that Anne spoke her words 'very bouldlye and withowtt blushing or any shame

¹²⁵ 'The Kind Lady, Or, The Loves of Stella and Adonis', *Pepys* iii, p.162; 'The jealous Lover satisfy'd', *Pepys* iii, p.218; 'The Kind Lovers, Or Cupid's Conquest over Bashfulness', *Pepys* iii, p.228.

¹²⁶ *Poor Robin's Jests*, Sig. A4r.

¹²⁷ T. Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (London, 1607) edited B. Scobie (London, 1991), VI, 154-57; XVII, 55-57, pp.32, 87.

¹²⁸ T. Heywood, *The Captives, or The Lost Recovered* (London, 1624) I. i. 116-18 in P. Merchant (ed.) *Thomas Heywood: Three Marriage Plays* (Manchester and New York, 1996), p.193.

¹²⁹ Heywood, *English Traveller*, V. i. 129-31, p.181.

att all or womanlike modesteye'.¹³⁰ Barnabe Rich claimed that a bold, impudent, and shameless woman could not blush because she 'hath lost her evidence of honesty: for the ornaments of a good woman is temperance in her minde, silence in her tongue, and bashfulnesse in her countenance'.¹³¹ By contrast *The Academy of Pleasure* told of one woman who informed her lover that he seemed 'so honest and so civill, that I dare bid you welcome without a blush'.¹³²

White skin was also considered a marker of beauty and was associated with nobility, urbanity and eroticism, denoting physical purity and linked with concealed, intimate parts of female bodies. As Laura Gowing has noted 'no one commented on seeing men's white skin, but for women, undressing and exposing constituted sexual narratives with their own force'.¹³³ Literary representations eroticised female breasts by comparing them to lilies, ivory, and snow, and in Renaissance art a sensual white complexion alluded to female physical and material beauty.¹³⁴ One young woman murdered in Stepney was 'supposed to be of some Quality' as she had 'a very Clear Skin and soft Hand' and 'several good Features'.¹³⁵ Samuel Pepys observed that Mrs Lane had a 'very white thigh and leg' and good skin.¹³⁶ In *The Shoemaker's Holiday* Simon Eyre refers to Jane's white hand and pretty fingers.¹³⁷ Ballads referred to the 'ivory arms' of beautiful women, and to their 'snow-white' breasts 'like alabaster'.¹³⁸ *Loves Victory Obtained* depicted a maid with milk-white skin, a fair complexion, and

¹³⁰ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.73.

¹³¹ Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, p.44.

¹³² *Academy of Pleasure*, p.95.

¹³³ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p.105.

¹³⁴ N. Miller, 'Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period' in N. J. Miller and N. Yavneh (eds.), *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the early modern period* (Aldershot, 2000), p.4; Eco, *On Beauty*, p.194.

¹³⁵ *An Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Murder* (London, 1684).

¹³⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 29 June 1663, iv, p.203.

¹³⁷ T. Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday or The Gentle Craft* (London, 1600), 1, 207-08 in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.8.

¹³⁸ 'Faint heart never won fair Lady: Or, Good Advice to Batchelors How to Court and Obtain a Young Lass', *Pepys* iii, p.21; 'A constant Wife, a kinde Wife, A louing Wife, and a fine Wife', *Pepys* i, p.391; 'Loves Boundless Power Or, The Charmed Lovers happiness Completed', *Pepys* iii, p.194.

eyes that shone like 'glistening stars'.¹³⁹ The display of a woman's white skin could be accidental and was often described erotically. In *The Gowlin* the milk-white skin of the female beggar was visible through her torn clothes and *The Handsome Maid of Milkstreet* uncovered her shoulders to 'show my skin white and fair'.¹⁴⁰ The texture as well as the colour of skin was important. In *The Devil is an Ass* Wittipol notes the white and soft skin of Mistress Fitzdottrel.¹⁴¹ The heroine of *The Jovial Lass* had a belly as soft as silk.¹⁴²

Although there appears to have been a general preference for women with fair hair and complexion, tastes varied. Generally tanned skin signified a woman of low social status, forced to work outdoors and thus weather worn, some men chose to see it as signifying the virtues of a natural, simple, and innocent life. In *The London Lady* a scrivener entered a shop to buy parchment and was propositioned by the serving girl who told him flirtatiously that she would show him 'soft and white' if he would be her 'Merchant'.¹⁴³ Although it may have been relatively easy for a London shop-girl to maintain such a complexion, rural women found it more difficult. *The Countrey Lasse* described being shrouded from the sun by a garland of flowers, suggesting that she wanted to keep her pale complexion despite having to work as a shepherdess.¹⁴⁴ Similarly Emanuel van Meteren told how English women 'know very well how to protect the complexion of their faces against the power of the sun with hats and veils, and their hands with gloves – even the very peasants'.¹⁴⁵ Philip Stubbes described how country girls wore 'silk scarffes cast about their faces, & fluttering in the winde, with great tassels at euery end, either of gold, siluerr, or silk' to 'keep them from

¹³⁹ 'Loves Victory Obtained', *Pepys* iii, p.32.

¹⁴⁰ 'The Gowlin: Or, A Pleasant Fancy for the Spring', *Pepys* iii, p.108; 'The Handsome Maid of Milkstreet', *Pepys* iii, p.289.

¹⁴¹ Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, II. vi. 113, p.264.

¹⁴² 'The Jovial Lass: Or Doll and Roger', *Pepys* iii, p.116.

¹⁴³ 'The London Lady Or, Wise and Wanton' (London, 1689), *Pepys* iii, p.41.

¹⁴⁴ 'The Countrey Lasse', *Pepys* i, p.268.

¹⁴⁵ W. B. Rye (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First* (London, 1865), pp.69-70.

Sunburning'.¹⁴⁶ However, despite such comments, women with tanned skin were perceived as being attractive. Samuel Pepys spotted 'a pretty brown lass' working in a Fleet Street victualling house, Richard Tarlton saw 'a pretty nut-browne Lasse' whilst lodging in a village near Bristol, and the heroine of *Ioan is as good as my Lady* was 'a louely browne'.¹⁴⁷ Dark haired women had their admirers as well, at least in Samuel Pepys, who described one of the daughters of Mr Bumfield as 'black, but well shaped and modest', deemed the wife of his goldsmith to be 'the prettiest modest black woman that ever I saw', caught sight of 'a very comely black maid' working as the servant of an old woman in Pannier Alley, and considered the daughter of Mrs Turner to be 'a pretty black girl'.¹⁴⁸

The types of women early modern people deemed attractive were diverse, but some attributes were considered more attractive than others. Young women between their mid-teens and mid-twenties were regarded as the epitome of female beauty. As many such women worked as servants, their beauty coupled with the physical realities domestic service made them vulnerable to sexually predators. Women began to lose their looks as they aged, but some women were still considered attractive later in life. As well as age, bearing, carriage, noble looks, a slender physical build, delicate hands, and a pale complexion were all deemed to be attractive attributes. However, as not all women possessed the expected physical characteristics, many had used cosmetics and other beauty aids to achieve the desired appearance.

¹⁴⁶ P. Stubbes, *Anatomie of The Abuses in England* (1583) edited by F. J. Furnivall (London, 1879), p.79.

¹⁴⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 20 August 1662, iii, p.172; Tarlton, *Tarltons Jests*, Sig. D2v; 'Ione is as good as my Lady', *Pepys i*, p.236.

¹⁴⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 6 August 1663, iv, p.265; 19 June 1665, vi, pp.131-32; 13 April 1666, 6 June 1666, vii, p.98, 152.

Cosmetics and Deceptions

In 1585 Samuel Kiechel remarked that Englishwomen were 'by nature so mighty pretty, as I have scarcely ever beheld, for they do not falsify, paint or bedaub themselves as in Italy or other places'.¹⁴⁹ His kind words betrayed a literal short-sighted naivety. London women relied on numerous sources of advice and methods to maintain high standards of beauty, including speaking with friends and acquaintances, consulting recipe books, and visiting beauticians. In *The Devil is an Ass* Merecraft describes a widow who 'keeps the Spanish habit' and whom fashionable women visit for 'rare receipts', tinctures, 'pomatums', perfumes, oils, medicines, and 'quintessences'.¹⁵⁰ *A Closet for Ladies and Gentlewomen* contained a 'Diet drinke', together with remedies to remove pock-holes and spots, prevent stinking breath, cure red faces and pimples, and 'make the face white and faire'.¹⁵¹ The woman operating from Racket Court near Fleet Street offered various products including a beautifying face wash that removed 'wrinkles, freckles, pimples, redness, morpew, sun-burn, yellowness or any other accident'; powder to whiten the teeth; a 'diet drink' to cure consumption; 'a delicate ointment' to prevent smallpox scarring; and a 'secret to prevent hair from falling' that transformed red or grey hair into 'a most delicate light or dark brown'. Other services included shaping eyebrows, raising foreheads, plasters to remove hair from anywhere on the body, a paste to smooth and whiten the hands, and 'a curious red pomatum to plump and colour the lips'.¹⁵² Even women who could not afford such items could find cheaper means to maintain a beautiful appearance. Elizabeth Pepys spent one night in Woolwich so she could collect May dew the next morning, something Mrs Turner had told her was 'the only

¹⁴⁹ Rye (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners*, p.78.

¹⁵⁰ Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, II. viii. 27-36, p.267.

¹⁵¹ *A Closet for Ladies and Gentlewomen. Or, The Art of Preserving, Conserving and Candyng* (London, 1636).

¹⁵² BL, 551 a. 32, no. 24 in Crawford and Gowing (ed.), *Women's Worlds*, pp.38-40.

thing in the world to wash her face withal'.¹⁵³ Henry Peacham claimed that 'an hard-favoured and ill bred wench made penny-white, may ... prove a gallant Lady' because 'for a penny, a Chamber-maid may buy as much Red-oaker as will serve seven years for the painting of her Cheeks'.¹⁵⁴ Connected to the use of cosmetics and beauty aids was the fact that a concern for personal hygiene was a marker of female respectability. Elizabeth Pepys washed and did 'other things' the evening before she went to the Royal Court, and was likewise concerned with the hygiene of those she employed. Before showing one girl to Samuel as a potential maidservant, she cleaned her of lice and gave her new clothes.¹⁵⁵ Various ballads and texts described the 'fragrant breath' and 'rich perfume' of women, and one eulogised about a woman who smelled 'like paradise'.¹⁵⁶

Many women therefore used recipes and cosmetics to beautify themselves, but their actions were controversial. Female desires for ornaments, cosmetics, and other forms of beautification had concerned moralising philosophers and theologians since antiquity, and such concerns continued into the early modern period.¹⁵⁷ The *Homily Against Excess of Apparel* claimed any women 'who can paint her face, and curl her hair, and change it into an unnatural colour ... doth work reproof in her Maker ... as though she could make herself more comely than God hath appointed the measure of her beauty'. No 'wise and Christian husband' was to 'delight to see his wife in such painted and flourished visages, which common harlots most do use to train therewith their lovers to naughtinesse' since 'these be but the vain excuses of such as go about to please rather others than their husbands'.¹⁵⁸ 'Beauties that should be concealed, too

¹⁵³ Pepys, *Diary*, 28 May 1667, viii, p.240.

¹⁵⁴ Peacham, *Worth of a Penny*, pp.21-22.

¹⁵⁵ Pepys, *Diary*, 21 November 1660, i, p.298; 23 August 1663, iv, p.285.

¹⁵⁶ *Academy of Pleasure*, p.31; 'Loves Conquest; Or, The Powerful force of Beautyes Charms', *Pepys* iii, p.105; 'Loves Boundless Power Or, The Charmed Lovers happiness Completed', *Pepys* iii, p.194; 'The Mad Man's morice', *Pepys* iii, p.315.

¹⁵⁷ Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Women*, pp.15-16.

¹⁵⁸ *A Sermon Against Excess of Apparel in Sermons or Homilies, to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London, 1817), pp.289-90.

grosly discovered, are faire signes hung out to entice to an unhospitable Inne' claimed *The Mothers Counsel*, before asking, 'doth painting betoken in a woman, a diseased soule marked with adultery'? The pamphleteer believed God would condemn the 'artificiall painting' of women who sought 'to correct his workmanship', denigrating 'a painted womans face' as 'a liuer smeared with carrion, her beauty baits of dead wormes her lookes nets, and her words inticing charmes'.¹⁵⁹ Robert Cleaver advised couples to 'deale plainly and faithfully one with the other' regarding 'imperfections, infirmities, and wants in either of their bodies'.¹⁶⁰ John Wing suggested husbands 'be taught how to try her whome we have sought and founde, whether she be inwardly and indeede, that, which in externall appearance, and shew, she seemeth, & would be thought to be, by all that shall take notice of her'.¹⁶¹

Barnabe Rich denigrated the 'borrowed beautie' of cosmetics, enquiring 'how many vices are hidden vnder these painted faces, what deformity couered with vailes & marks, what crooked minds vnder streightened bodyes, what violating of honour under counterfeit showes of comelines'. Rich attributed women's 'painting of faces' to their desire 'to please the eyes of men which they thinke are the sooner drawne to a liking by some appearing beauty', and claimed that women frequently went too far when using cosmetics, so that 'in steade of making themselues louely, they many times become loathsome and odious, not onely in the conceiptes of all honest men, but euen to those to whom they be most desirous to please and content'. 'How many women are there in these dayes that do imploy all there studdies and bend their whole indeuours, but onely to the adorninge of there bodily beautie, as if they had beene created by God, but onely to make themselues appeare to be gaye and beautifull' he asked.¹⁶² Joseph Swetnam compared a beautiful woman to 'a painted ship, which

¹⁵⁹ M. R., *Mothers Counsell*, pp.24, 28-30.

¹⁶⁰ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.100.

¹⁶¹ Wing, *Crowne Conjugall*, p.82.

¹⁶² Rich, *Excellency of Good Women*, pp.21-22.

seemeth faire outwardly & yet nothing but ballace within hir, or as the Idolls in Spaine which are brauely gilt outwardly and yet nothing but lead within them'. 'Many women are in shape Angells, but in qualities Devills, painted coffins with rotten bones' he wrote. 'Although women are beautifull, shewing pittie, yet their heartes are blacke, swelling with mischief, not much unlike unto old trees, whose outward leaves are faire and greene and yet the body rotten'.¹⁶³ Ballads advised bachelors to examine the forehead, brow, cheeks, eyes, nose and chin of a prospective wife, warning that 'All is not Gold which Glisters / nor it is not all lead that looks dull', and that 'the fairest apple to the eye, may haue a rotten core'.¹⁶⁴ Samuel Pepys described a prostitute in Fleet Alley as 'a lovely woman', but had 'no courage to meddle with her, for fear of her not being wholesome'.¹⁶⁵

Some women agreed with the moralists. Sarah Cowper disapproved of using cosmetics to maintain a youthful appearance, and Susanna Jesserson claimed that a good wife 'cannot indure any paint on her cheeks, but the natural vermillion of modest blushes'.¹⁶⁶ Condemnation of women using cosmetics also surfaced in jest-books and court records. Several jests played on the idea that whores were 'painted' women.¹⁶⁷ Robert Ealing reported that Mrs Burges had used 'painted faced curled lock curr' as an insult.¹⁶⁸ Samuel Pepys spotted a woman who was 'old and handsome and painted and fine, and hath a very handsome maid with her' which he claimed were considered to be 'the marks of a bawd'.¹⁶⁹

Despite such negative connotations, some authors defended women who used cosmetics. Although the author of *The Royal Academy of Complements* told women

¹⁶³ Swetnam, *Araignment*, pp.3, 30-31.

¹⁶⁴ 'The English Fortune-Teller', *Pepys* iii, p.152; 'A Caueat or Warning. For all Sortes of Men', *Pepys* i, p.46.

¹⁶⁵ Pepys, *Diary*, 23 July 1664, v, p.219-20.

¹⁶⁶ Kugler, 'I feel myself decay apace', p.73; S. Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors. Or: The Best Wife In the World for a Penny* (London, 1675), p.6.

¹⁶⁷ Taylor, *Wit and Mirth*, jest 32; *Poor Robin's Jests*, p.41; Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.58.

¹⁶⁸ LMA DL/C/235, fo. 233r.

¹⁶⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 30 April 1662, iii, p.74.

to 'dote not so much upon your own beauty', they also claimed to seek 'to reconcile Ladies countenances, with their consciences', castigating 'rustick or rigid spirits' for forcing women to endure 'naturall or accidentall defects, not allowing them to use the least reliefe, never so obvious in Nature, and not lesse innocent, than easie in Art'.¹⁷⁰ 'Women that paint most, shall live longest; for where the house is kept in repair, there is no fear but it will be inhabited' quipped one jest.¹⁷¹ Another joke focussed on a gentlewoman with 'breath so Pestiferous, that it would have killed Love dead at a furlong distance' who was forced to conceal the stench with 'a profusion of Odours, as if she had carried all the Aromaticks of the Indies before her'. The jester listed the products used, including 'Civit, Musk, Orodium, and Jessamines', claiming the smell was comparable to 'all the Perfumers in Town' releasing their products at once. The tactics worked and the woman began to acquire suitors, until she 'trod in somewhat not so sweet as a Rose'.¹⁷² This reference to the use of exotic cosmetics is intriguing. Although the jester listed the products used and suggested that they could be obtained from a London perfumer, the reader was left to decide whether women ought to use exotic perfumes; that her seduction tactics backfired suggested it was not.

Although the use of cosmetics, perfumes, and other beauty aids led to criticism from some, women who did not measure up to expected standards of cleanliness and beauty risked receiving derogatory comments and abuse. Women unable to afford, or who chose not to use recipes to conceal facial blemishes received negative comments. Even women who were deemed to have attractive bodies might be subject to criticism if they had freckled, spotted, or scarred complexions. Samuel Pepys deemed his sister to be 'a pretty good-bodied woman', but added that she was 'full of freckles and not handsome in face'. Similarly he recorded that Doll Lane had 'a bad face', but was a

¹⁷⁰ *A Discourse of Auxiliary Beauty*, Sig. A2v-A3r.

¹⁷¹ Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.47.

¹⁷² *London Jests*, pp.69-71.

‘good-bodied girl’.¹⁷³ One jest centred on Richard Tarlton mocking a lady attending a banquet in Greenwich, whose face was full of pimples and refused to drink wine with the other women. ‘A marren of that face, which makes all the body fare the worse for it’ quipped Tarlton.¹⁷⁴ One ballad described women with stinking breath and mouldy bodies, and referred to women as ‘old fish’.¹⁷⁵ *The English Fortune Teller* warned young men not to marry a ‘dirty foul slut’ who would ‘poyson the gut’.¹⁷⁶

Many insults deployed against women alleged they had poor personal hygiene. Sara Snosman was alleged to ‘drop with lice’.¹⁷⁷ According to Suzan May, Elizabeth Barwicke was ‘pocky faced’ and ‘rotten toothed’, whilst Thomas Will claimed Jane Holliley was ‘filthy, stinking [and] poxy’.¹⁷⁸ Robert Hewethen defamed Hester Grubbe as a ‘dunghill whore’ and Elizabeth Ayres claimed Catherine York ‘stuncke and dropped’. Mrs Crippes described Mrs Norton being ‘as common as dirty water’ and Mary Wickham claimed Mrs Bushwell was ‘durtie [and] stinking’.¹⁷⁹ If the bodily cleanliness of a woman did not conform to expected standards, she might be subjected to a purifying shaming ritual. Francis Finch overheard Elizabeth Walsh tell her servant ‘to pull or drag Mary Peters by the hair of her head unto the pump and to wash her’.¹⁸⁰

While moralists deplored the obsession with female beauty by both women and men, it is clear that ill-favoured women were likely to find their looks used as a weapon against them. Insults focussed on appearance as well as sexual immorality, and often linked the two. Joane Ridley was defamed as ‘ill-favoured faced whore’, and Dorothy Foster called Sara Pudlan ‘an ugly whore, a base whore and a damned

¹⁷³ Pepys, *Diary*, 31 May 1666; 26 October 1666, vii, pp.138, 342.

¹⁷⁴ Tarlton, *Tarltons Jests*, Sig. A2v.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Joans Victory Over her Fellow-Servants’, *Pepys* iii, p.137.

¹⁷⁶ ‘The English Fortune-Teller’, *Pepys* iii, p.152.

¹⁷⁷ GL MS 9057/1, fos. 126r-127r.

¹⁷⁸ LMA DL/C/231, fos. 114v, 122v, 208r.

¹⁷⁹ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 45v, 127v, 144v, 186r-v.

¹⁸⁰ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 151r.

whore'.¹⁸¹ In more genteel style Samuel Pepys claimed that 'the very sight of my aunt's hands and greasy manner of carving did almost turn my stomach' and described a kinswoman of the Blands as 'a short, ugly red-haired slut'.¹⁸²

London women could find out about and obtain beauty products with relative ease, but the decision to use them was a matter of individual conscience. Notions of whores and prostitutes as 'painted ladies' would have discouraged many women from using such products, but simultaneously women who did not conform to conventional models of female beauty were denigrated as a result, and may have decided to employ beauty aids in order to be considered within the boundaries of contemporary standards of beauty.

Conclusion

London was to some degree an alienating city of strangers due to the rapid population turnover resulting from frequent movement of people in, out, and around the city, and high mortality rates. Women and men were thus judged by physical appearances that in turn were affected by gender, and the fact Londoners assessed individuals on such superficial criteria encouraged competition between women with regard to beauty. However, beauty was transient, affected by age, disease and pregnancy, and linked too closely with the image of the whore to make it possible for women to be praised solely for their physical appearances. Moralists argued that beauty had to be coupled with practical abilities and inner virtues that were supposed to be signified by the physical appearance of a woman, but rarely were. Nonetheless beauty empowered women to a degree as the right kind of beauty could attract men in the competitive marriage market, and good self-presentation helped women find employment.

¹⁸¹ LMA DL/C/231, fos. 5v, 154v.

¹⁸² Pepys, *Diary*, 22 April 1663; 24 July 1663, iv, pp.108, 242.

The beautiful female body was one that suggested nobility, and age, build, hair colour, and skin complexion were all facets of the female physical ideal. Figures that were deemed attractive were youthful, but also sexual, so although slenderness was an ideal for women to aspire too, full breasts and a curvaceous figure were also admired by some. In London pale complexions seem to have been thought more beautiful, and throughout England white skin was considered alluring, although some redness in the complexion was needed as blushing hinted at modesty, honesty, and fertility. Female cleanliness was also important, and was contrasted with the dirty and diseased bodies of whores, but women who used cosmetics were treated suspiciously since they were assumed to be covering diseased, whorish bodies. At the same time being unhygienic was deemed unacceptable and led to derogatory comments being levelled at women. The creation of an honourable female identity meant considering physical appearance, which in turn was affected by how women used cosmetics, perfume, and clothes. It is the latter which the next chapter discusses.

2. Women's clothes and female honour

For if we goe plaine we are sluts they do say,
They doubt of our honesty if we goe gay¹

Introduction

In the first chapter we saw how physical appearance was used both to praise and denigrate early modern women. However, although recent histories of gender have shown how ideas about bodies were deployed to mark and justify inequalities between the sexes in pre-industrial societies, the history of the clothes that covered those physical forms has been an under-explored topic, despite its centrality to social, economic, and cultural history. If Alan Macfarlane is correct to assert that 'an average Elizabethan was as ... well-dressed ... as an average inhabitant of England in any period up to the late nineteenth century' then the social significance of clothing is worth exploring.² Foreign visitors often noted the dress of Englishwomen. Visiting the capital in 1592 Frederick, Duke of Wurrtemberg, described Londoners as 'magnificently appparelled' with hats and 'gowns after the old German fashion', and noted that 'the women have much more liberty than perhaps in any other place; they also know well how to make use of it, for they go dressed out in exceedingly fine clothes, and give all their attention to their ruffs and stuffs, to such a degree indeed, that as I am informed, many a one does not hesitate to wear velvet in the streets'. Emanuel van Meteren wrote that Englishwomen would 'sit before their doors, decked

¹ E. Sowernam, *Ester hath hang'd Haman: Or An Answere to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignement of Women* (London, 1617), p.51.

² A. Macfarlane, 'Civility and the Decline of Magic' in P. Burke, B. Harrison and P. Slack (eds.), *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford, 2000), p.155. For descriptions of the dress of prosperous middling-sort women see C. Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (New York and London, 1952), pp.219-30 and Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.282, 285.

out in fine clothes, in order to see and be seen'.³ The English themselves also realised the importance of what they wore. 'Clothes, I perceive more and more every day, is a great matter', wrote Samuel Pepys.⁴ This chapter explores how clothes affected female reputations in early modern London. What did clerics, moralists, pamphleteers, and playwrights deem to be appropriate female dress? How did women acquire clothes and how did the movement of clothes between people affect female honour? How could women use clothes to empower themselves, and where did the boundaries lie between a woman dressing well, and attiring herself in a manner whereby she risked losing her honour that might attract criticism and perhaps threaten her good name?

Women's clothing shaped perceptions of the gendered body and had symbolic connotations that reinforced sexual difference, honour, and respectability.⁵ Clothing was supposed to be an important means of identifying the social position, quality, and character of an individual, but like beauty it was an unreliable signifier. Whores were associated with expensive finery and were accused of disrupting the household economies of respectable families through their demands for clothes. Maidservants were bribed with gifts of clothes, both from suspicious husbands to spy on their mistresses and from adulterous wives to ensure their silence. Plebeian women in luxurious clothes were suspected of prostituting themselves to acquire such garments whilst the fashionable clothes of citizens' wives sometimes resembled the attire of prostitutes.⁶ Clothes thus had a powerful, but problematic role in regulating female bodies and defining appropriate female behaviour.⁷ Yet as Laura Gowing has noted,

³ W. B. Rye (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First* (London, 1865), pp.7, 72.

⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 28 December 1664, v, p.358.

⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.59.

⁶ F. Dabhoiwala, 'The Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status in Late-Seventeenth and Early-Eighteenth Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 6 (1996), pp.207-10; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.82-83, 90-91, 192.

⁷ C. Richardson, 'Introduction' in id. (ed.), *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), p.17.

‘in a society in which clothes were to some degree a marker of class, and people rarely changed their clothes, the difference between a category marked by the body and one marked by clothes needs to be construed with care’.⁸ Bodies were so often clothed that attire became ‘part of both the visible self, and inner subjectivity’.⁹ Clothes became accoutrements for female self-fashioning, and cultural artefacts that linked to and created body images that defined female identity and respectability.

Clothing was the second largest household expenditure after food, accounting for up to sixteen per cent of domestic budgets. The daily routines of women necessitated them having practical and informal work clothes that wore out quickly and needed to be repaired or replaced regularly, whilst middling-sort women expected to have ‘best’ clothes for special occasions.¹⁰ Gregory King calculated that a quarter of national expenditure was spent on clothing in 1688, and his own household devoted thirty-four pounds, or twenty-two per cent of the domestic budget to clothes.¹¹ The importance of fashionable attire was greatest in London since new fashions appeared initially in the capital. The turnover of clothes was quicker and the markets larger than in the rest of England, although middling-sort and poorer women bought and bartered for second-hand clothes, or acquired materials, accessories and patterns to make their own attire rather than buy new items made especially for them.¹² Other acquisitions of clothes were accidental or fortuitous, such as when Elizabeth Pepys discovered and kept ‘a good black hood’ that she found in a church pew.¹³ Sara

⁸ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.5.

⁹ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p.34.

¹⁰ L. Weatherill, ‘Consumer Behaviour, Textiles and Dress in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries’, *Textile History*, 22:2 (1991), pp.298-301, 307-09.

¹¹ N. B. Harte, ‘The Economics of Clothing in the Late Seventeenth Century’, *Textile History*, 22:2 (1991), pp.278, 285; Cf. Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.285-90.

¹² J. Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1978), pp.106-32; M. Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1984), pp.16-17, 88-105, 118-46. B. Lemire, ‘Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes’, *Journal of British Studies*, 27:1 (January 1988), pp.1-24; Earle, *City Full of People*, pp.254-55.

¹³ Pepys, *Diary*, 4 February 1660, i, p.42.

Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have suggested that women had a 'moral' and 'psychological' proprietorship over their clothing, and have observed that memoirs of young women often reveal a desire to acquire beautiful or flattering clothes. Women shared, loaned, bartered, and gave clothes to their friends, relatives, and neighbours. Wives who were able to invest in clothes that they could pawn in desperate times, whilst single female household dependents often claimed to be worth 'little or nothing' other than their clothes when giving evidence in court.¹⁴

Payments, gifts, and distributions of clothes bound people together socially and culturally, whilst uniformity of clothes, gradations of cost and cloth, and the use of colour and emblems affected the meanings of clothes and impressions of wearers. Informal transfers of clothes as bequests, gratuities, or gifts acted as signifiers of office and status. The legitimacy of clothing was determined by individual social connections, and clothes were interpreted as a key to identity. However, as identities were strategic and self-conscious, adopted and rejected according to circumstances, there was rarely any consensus on the meanings of clothes.¹⁵ Clothes were thus much more than practical necessities. They played an important role in society as indicators of social identity and moral worth, and the authorities were anxious to preserve and enforce these distinctions.

Sumptuary legislation aimed to restrict what materials people could wear, in part to protect the domestic economy, but primarily to reinforce social order. In 1560 the Mayor of London ordered the aldermen to observe what people wore and examine and arrest suspected offenders, whilst similar measures were imposed at the Inns of Court and Chancery, and in Westminster and the suburbs. The principal targets were apprentices and male servants, and only from the 1570s were direct restrictions placed

¹⁴ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.219-223; Earle, *City Full of People*, p.254.

¹⁵ J. Crawford, 'Clothing Distributions and Social Relations c.1350-1500' in C. Richardson (ed.), *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), pp.154-56, 164.

on female dress. Yet the rapid pace of social mobility in the sixteenth century made it virtually impossible to enforce the laws, and they were removed from the statute book in 1604, with attempts to reintroduce state control of dress in the seventeenth century proving unsuccessful.¹⁶ The impact of sumptuary legislation on women was therefore brief and largely ineffective. Fashions filtered down the social order, enabling women to use clothes to present themselves as individuals. Moreover, fashion was not solely about expensive clothes, but also encompassed everyday items such as petticoats and aprons, and the personalisation of attire with decorative embroidery.¹⁷ The small quantities of clothing that the lesser sorts owned meant that any new item had the potential to alter the appearance of an individual drastically.¹⁸ For example, Samuel Pepys observed that Mrs Burroughs was ‘a mightily ordinary woman’ when she was ‘undressed’.¹⁹ Joseph Swetnam was less polite. ‘Take away their painted cloathes, and then they looke like ragged matts’, he remarked, ‘take away their ruffes and they looke ruggedly, their coyses and stomachers and they are simple to beholde’.²⁰ In a society where clothes led people to make moral judgements on their wearers, but where there were no fixed meanings of what clothes signified, women had to tread cautiously. Clerics, balladeers, pamphleteers, and playwrights were more than ready to offer guidance in sartorial matters.

What to wear

Early modern people linked clothing with manners and morality. In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas had suggested that to avoid being sinful dress ought to be

¹⁶ W. Hooper, ‘The Tudor Sumptuary Laws’, *English Historical Review*, 30:119 (July, 1915), pp.433-49; F. E. Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore, 1926), pp.192-275; N. B. Harte, ‘State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England’ in D. C. Coleman and A. H. John (eds.), *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays Presented to F. J. Fisher* (London, 1976), pp.132-65.

¹⁷ A. Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1750* (London, 1994), p.146.

¹⁸ C. Richardson, “‘Havying nothing upon hym saving onely his sherte’: event, narrative and material culture in early modern England’ in id. (ed.), *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), p.216.

¹⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 25 July 1666, vii, p.218.

²⁰ J. Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle Froward and Unconstant Women* (London, 1615), p.25.

both moderate and appropriate to the customs of the society of the wearer; dress was thus not a universal language, but carried a range of meanings specific to particular environments.²¹ Church teachings promoted restrictive notions of what women ought to wear. Respectable clothing for a woman depended on her marital status, and for wives the status and rank of their husbands affected their choice of attire. The *Homily on Matrimony* informed wives that the apparel of their heads signified they were *femme covert*, and that their clothing should express 'shamefacedness and sobriety'.²² Emanuel van Meteren noted that 'married women only wear a hat both in the street and in the house' whilst unmarried women 'go about the streets without any covering'.²³ The *Sermon against Excess of Apparel* sought to restrict what women and men could wear in terms of both expense and the potentially sexually provocative nature of clothing, warning congregations not to make 'provision for the flesh, to accomplish the lusts thereof, with costly apparel'. Moderation was invariably emphasised. Women and men were not to take 'inordinate care and affection' over their clothes as this might distract them from contemplating divine matters. Both sexes were instead to be aware of their 'estate and condition' and content themselves with what God had provided since 'all may not look to wear like apparel, but every one according to his degree'.²⁴

Robert Cleaver believed it was in part possible to discern the disposition of an individual by their apparel, and that modest people were 'for the most part knowne by their sober attire'. Although he argued that husbands should 'clothe their wives decently', Cleaver insisted that a woman should not 'weare gorgeous apparel, beyond her degree and place', and instead should be 'content with such apparell and outward port, as her husbands estate can allow her'. In his opinion female dress ought to be 'modest, and mannerly', 'honest and sober', 'handsome and 'huswifelike', and

²¹ U. Ilg, 'The Cultural Significance of Costume Books in Sixteenth-Century England' in C. Richardson (ed.), *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), pp.45-47.

²² *An Homily of The State of Matrimony* (1562) in *Sermons or Homilies, to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London, 1817), p.476.

²³ Rye, *England as seen by Foreigners*, p.73.

²⁴ *A Sermon Against Excess of Apparel* in *Sermons or Homilies, to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London, 1817), pp.284-85.

‘comely and sober’, suitable to a woman’s calling. The dress of the good wife ought to be chaste, plain, and shamefaced, ‘decked without as she is within’. However, although Cleaver attempted to delineate appropriate dress, he acknowledged that it was hard for women ‘to come in the fashion, and not to be in the abuse’.²⁵ His remark suggests he recognised that even respectable women might experience some tensions between the dictates of social decorum and morality, a theme to which this chapter will return.

William Gouge preached that nature and custom ought to dictate the suitability of female attire, and that women should indicate their inferiority by wearing a veil and covering their heads. Through the clothes they wore women were to show respect for the place and status of their husbands, and also for their own birth, parentage, ‘minde and humour’. According to Gouge female modesty required a woman’s clothes to be ‘neither for costlinesse above her husbands abilitie, nor for curiousnesse unbeseeming his calling’, and argued that just as ‘a poore mans wife must not affect costly apparel’ the wives of ‘ministers, grave Counsellours, Sage Magistrates ... [and] conscionable Professours’ were not to ‘hunt after new fashions’ or wear ‘light and garish apparel’.²⁶ William Harrison noted that ‘chaste and sober matrons’ wore ‘such staring attire as in times past was supposed meet for none but light housewives...doublets with pendant codpieces on the breast, full of jogs and cuts, and sleeves of sundry colors’. ‘I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women’, he complained. ‘Those good gifts which almighty God hath given unto us to relieve our necessities withal [are now] not otherwise bestowed than in all excess’. Harrison blamed young merchants’ wives, who ‘in attire and costly housekeeping, cannot tell when and how to make an end’.²⁷

²⁵ R. Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1598), pp.89, 97, 107-08, 142, 170, 218-19.

²⁶ W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), pp.270, 280.

²⁷ W. Harrison, *The Description of England* edited by G. Edelen (Ithaca NY, 1968), pp.147-48.

Pamphleteers and authors of domestic advice literature conveyed similar ideas about female clothing. Alexander Niccholes argued that women should be 'decently, not dotingly; thriftily, not lasciviously' attired.²⁸ Gervase Markham believed the apparel of the housewife ought to reflect 'the competency of her husbands state and calling' and be 'comly and strong, made as well to preserve the health, as adorne the person, although without toyish garnishes, or the glosse of light colours, and as far from the vanity of new fantasticke fashions, as neere to the comely imitations of modest Matrons'.²⁹ According to Susanna Jesserson the good woman should match 'her cloaths to her husbands quality and ability, rather then the fashion' and not be 'perpetually draining [his] purse for Modish vanities'. She was to spend 'more time in prayer and exercises of devotion, than between the glass and the dressing-box' and not envy 'her next Neighbours New Gown or richer Laces'.³⁰ Jost Amman, who published a costume book in Frankfurt in 1586, depicted an Englishwoman 'clothed according to her social position', and explained that if she wore anything else 'her husband would chase her out of the house' a comment that hinted at the possibility of different gendered views of what might constitute 'appropriate' female dress.³¹

Conduct book authors laid out for their readers other means by which women might be judged instead of through their clothes. John Birchall wanted women to be valued for having meek and quiet spirits.³² Daniel Rogers believed that a wife who was financially 'naked' but virtuous was better than one 'clothed in velvet, with her weight in silver'.³³ Philip Stubbes cited Socrates to argue that a woman's greatest ornament was 'that which sheweth her chastitie, and good demeanoure of body and mind ... not sumptuous attire, which rather sheweth her adulterate lyfe' and described how the Lacedemonian women, the Roman matrons, and the wife of the philosopher

²⁸ A. Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving* (London, 1615), p.33.

²⁹ G. Markham, *The English House-Wife* (London, 1637), pp.3-4.

³⁰ S. Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors. Or: The Best Wife In the World for a Penny* (London, 1675), p.6.

³¹ Ilg, 'Cultural Significance of Costume Books', p.45.

³² J. Birchall, *The Non-Pareil, Or The Vertous Daughter Surmounting All her Sisters* (York, 1614), p.34.

³³ D. Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour: Or, The Mutuall Crowne and Comfort of Godly, Loyall and Chaste Marriage* (London, 1642), pp.276, 294.

Philo had all rejected gifts of clothes, providing them as examples for contemporary women to emulate.³⁴ Individual women were praised for taking no interest in fashion. In *Man's Felicity and Misery* the husband asserts that his wife has no interest in competitiveness about fashions, proclaiming proudly that she 'will weare no yellow hose'.³⁵ In *Eastward Ho* Golding asks Mildred if 'costly garments, the title and fame of a lady, the fashion, observation, and reverence proper to such preferment' do not tempt her, but she claims that such 'flatteries of fortune ... bear one headlong in desire from one novelty to another' and that 'hasty advancements' are not natural.³⁶ Similarly some modest and virtuous citizens' wives rejected new fashions of the Restoration and continued to wear mid-century puritan styles.³⁷

Funeral sermons recorded elite godly women who upheld such ideals. Richard Chambers recalled that the Countess of Northumberland wore only modest apparel, 'needful for her estate' that was 'comely ... rather than costly', and Lady Ann Yarburch was praised for 'the plainness of her apparel and dress'.³⁸ For many women what their husbands thought of their clothes mattered. Katherine Stubbes appears to have shared her husband's opinions on female dress, and was said to dislike 'all kinde of Pride as well in apparel as otherwise'.³⁹ Mary Bewley dressed sufficiently well, 'as a woman professing godliness, not exceeding her husbands ranck'. 'If it had not been for her husbands credit' she would 'not have put on some of her apparel' and 'was so far from priding her self in her cloaths, that she was often heard to say, what a burden and expence of time is this dressing and undressing?'.⁴⁰ Bewley was an atypical

³⁴ P. Stubbes, *Anatomie of The Abuses in England* (1583) edited by F. J. Furnivall (London, 1879), p.46.

³⁵ 'Man's Felicity and Misery', *Pepys* i, p.393.

³⁶ G. Chapman, B. Jonson, and J. Marston, *Eastward Ho* (London, 1605), II. i. 56-65 in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.80.

³⁷ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.282-83.

³⁸ R. Chambers, *Sarachs Sepulture, Or A Funerall Sermon, preached for the Right Honourable and virtuous Lady, Dorothe Countesse of Northumberland, at Petworth in Sussex* (London, 1620), p.19; Sutcliffe, *A Sermon at the Funeral of the Virtuous Lady, and Honoured, Ann, late wife of Thomas Yarburch, Esq.* (London, 1682) p.18.

³⁹ P. Stubbes, *A Christall Glasse for Christian Women* (London, 1612), p.5.

⁴⁰ E. Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution For Christian Women* (London, 1659), p.6.

individual, and women were more often criticised for wanting to dress above their station. However, women were often careful to ensure that they wore the correct clothes for the occasion. When Edward Kirk wanted his wife Joan to visit his cousin with him, Joan was unwilling to go, 'saying she had not Cloaths good enough to go a visiting. Only when Edward told her he was not ashamed of her, and after Joan had borrowed a hood and scarf from her fellow servant Sarah Miller, was she willing to accompany him.⁴¹ Similarly Elizabeth Pepys changed her clothes before a social gathering with Samuel and their friends at *The Miter* tavern in Wood Street.⁴²

Godly paragons such as Katherine Stubbes and Mary Bewley were not universally admired. Several contemporaries associated such conspicuous plainness in dress with Puritanism, and attacked it in satire. John Earle mocked the clothes of puritan women with his portrait of the 'she precise hypocrite', 'a Non-conformist in a close stomacher and Ruffe of Geneva Print' whose purity 'consists much in her Linnen'.⁴³ In *The Alchemist* Ben Jonson targeted 'matrons of the holy assembly' who would not 'lay their hair out, or wear doublets, or have that idol starch about their linen'.⁴⁴ Jonson also satirised clerical critics of female attire in *Bartholomew Fair* where Zeal-of-the-Land Busy refers to a woman at the fair as 'Goldilocks, the purple strumpet In her yellow gown, and green sleeves'.⁴⁵ Constantia Munda broadened her attack to include all carping male critics, claiming that the sins they attributed to women were imagined, and asked 'why should you imploy your invention to lay open

⁴¹ OBP, 2 July 1684, t16840702-6.

⁴² Pepys, *Diary*, 19 September 1660, i, p.248.

⁴³ J. Earle, *Microcosmographie. Or, A piece of the World Discovered; in Essayes and Characters* (London, 1633), Sig. Kv.

⁴⁴ B. Jonson, *The Alchemist* (London, 1616), III. ii. 80-82 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.), *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.414.

⁴⁵ B. Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* (London, 1634), III. vi. 82-83 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.), *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.554.

new fashions of lewdnesse, which the worst of women scarce ever were acquainted with?’⁴⁶

The clergy generally devoted far more energy to denouncing female excess than to praising women who had avoided such temptations, and were especially severe on fashions they viewed as both foreign and extravagant. Those who wore clothes associated with other countries were perceived as treacherous and dangerous ‘others’, with papistry and lasciviousness linked to Spanish and Italian fabrics, and syphilis and ostentation with French materials.⁴⁷ *The Homily against Excess in Apparel* bemoaned fickle women vaunting clothes in many different styles, including ‘one of the Spanish fashion, another Turkey’, declaring that a woman ‘doth but deserve mocks and scorns, to set out all her commendation in Jewish and ethnic apparel, and yet brag of her Christianity.’⁴⁸ ‘Yea but a world of wonders it is, to see a woman created in Gods Image, so miscreate oft times and deformed, with her French, her Spanish, and her foolish fashions, that he that made her, when hee lookes upon her, shall hardly know her’, Robert Wilkinson observed.⁴⁹ Philip Stubbes claimed that ‘nouell Inuentions and new fangled fashions’ deformed and disguised both women and men, ‘making vs rather to resemble sauadge Beastes and stearne monsters, then continent sober and chaste Christians’. ‘Some weare Lattice capes with three hornes, three corners I should saie’, Stubbes remarked, comparing such head-clothes with ‘the forked capes of Popishe Priestes.’⁵⁰ John Williams complained that women ‘come vnto a Church, chimera like, halfe male, and halfe female; or as the Priests of the Indian Venus, halfe black, halfe white.’⁵¹ William Crompton

⁴⁶ C. Munda, *Worming of a mad Dogge: Or, A Soppe for Cerberus the Jaylor of Hell* (London, 1617), p.9.

⁴⁷ R. Hentschell, ‘A Question of Nation: Foreign Clothes on the English Subject’ in C. Richardson (ed.), *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), pp.49-53.

⁴⁸ *A Sermon Against Excess of Apparel*, pp.286, 290.

⁴⁹ R. Wilkinson, *Merchant Royall* (London, 1613), Sig. C3v + 1pp.

⁵⁰ Stubbes, *Anatomie*, pp.30, 69.

⁵¹ J. Williams, *A Sermon of Apparell, Preached before the Kings Maiestie and the Prince his Highnesse at Theobalds, the 22 of February, 1619* (London, 1620), pp.20-21.

considered ungodly women to be ‘the disgrace of Christianitie’ and condemned their ‘naked breasts, ear-rings, nose-iewels, with strange fantasticke fashions...walking with stretched forth neckes, wanton eyes, tripping nicely, as they goe’. Once ‘your muffs, ruffles, laces, lawnes, perfumes, rings, bracelets [are] ... laid aside’, asked Crompton, ‘what is left but a barren carcasse’?⁵²

Ballads and plays repeated the theme. *The Golden Age* depicted a society in which women had wisely rejected ‘foolish French fashion’, and ‘without Maske or Caroches’ rode civilly through the streets giving money to the poor.⁵³ Wasp refers to Mistress Overdo as ‘Mistress French-hood’ in *Bartholomew Fair*.⁵⁴ A rejected suitor in *The Academy of Pleasure* informed the woman who had slighted him that she was ‘no Amazonian Lady to put on steely armes and manage the sword and shield, though your head be hidden in a cambrick helmet’.⁵⁵ John Skelton’s description of Elynour Rumming describes the alewife ‘after the Saracens guise’,

With a whim wham, knit with a trim tram,

Vpon her brain-pan, like an Egyptian.⁵⁶

Clerical moralists and some balladeers and pamphleteers employed a conventional vocabulary to describe how they expected women to dress. Female clothing was to be sober, moderate, decent, and in no way sexually provocative, and, like beauty, clothes were supposed to signify the inward virtues of a woman. The limits that were placed on what women could wear depended on expense, but also on the estate and degree of their husbands and families within the social order. Although clothes were not to be over-elaborate, they were to be appropriate to the status of the wearer. Tradition and custom were also important, with exotic fashions from Catholic

⁵² W. Crompton, *A Lasting Jewell For Religious Woemen* (London, 1630), pp.22-23.

⁵³ ‘The Golden Age: Or, An Age of plaine-dealing’, *Pepys i*, p.152.

⁵⁴ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, I. v. 13-14, p.506.

⁵⁵ *The Royal Academy of Complements* (London, 1687), p.33.

⁵⁶ J. Skelton, *Elynor Rummin, The famous Ale-wife of England* (London, 1624), Sig. A4v.

Europe or influenced by non-European cultures being especially vulnerable to criticism.

There were, however, some dissenting voices within the moralising advice literature. Barnabe Rich did not consider the garments of a woman to be necessarily 'a true confirmation of incontinency of her body'. According to Rich, 'the rule of Christian sobriety' allowed a woman to wear what she wished as long as she did not go beyond 'the decency of fashion', 'the limits of her owne estate' or 'the boundaries of her husbands calling'. 'Silke, silver, and gold, are things indifferent of themselves, the use is all whereunto they are imployed: yet as there is a conveniency to be used in all behaviours, so there is a decency to be followed in fashion; neither do I think that all fashions that are now in use, are fit for every good woman to follow'.⁵⁷ Comments of this kind were probably more in line with the mentalities and practices of most London women, to which we now turn.

Meanings of clothing

Whilst female attire led to a great deal of anxious fulminating by male clerics, clothes held different meanings for women, and indeed men, in everyday life. The discussion and exchange of clothes encouraged female sociability. Alexander Niccholes wrote of how every woman 'knowes such a friend, and such a Gentlewoman her Gossip' to share a 'variety of Gownes, of giftes, of favours, and variety of pleasures'.⁵⁸ Pepys' diary reveals how clothes brought his wife Elizabeth into contact with several women. Elizabeth helped Margaret Penn select a flowered satin suit, took the advice of Lady Sandwich when choosing a petticoat 'of the new silk-striped stuffs', and was given a scarf by Samuel's Aunt Wight in return as for 'the many favours she had received of her'. Neither was Elizabeth the only woman to reinforce her friendships and social connections through an interest in clothes. Mrs Tooker and Sarah, the daughter of the

⁵⁷ B. Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse* (London, 1616), p.41.

⁵⁸ Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving*, p.20.

landlady of Samuel Pepys, went shopping for shoes together in St Martins.⁵⁹ The author of *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* described mothers teaching their daughters the intricacies of fashion so that 'the neighbouring gentlewomen, and your rich Nieces esteem themselves very much honoured with the injoyment of her company'.⁶⁰

Such behaviour often attracted criticism. 'If the deuill doe but ... inuent a new fashion for the children of Eue, no lockes can hold them, they must out to see', complained John Williams, explaining that he wished to remove women from 'our vaine and sinfull City, where all their imployment [is]...to heighe it abroad, to visit and to see [fashions]'.⁶¹ Several ballads condemned the interest women displayed in fashion. *The Batchelor's Feast* depicted a cuckolded husband complaining that his wife spent her entire morning in front of the looking glass choosing clothes from her fine and costly 'braue atyre' before gadding abroad with her gossips.⁶² *The Downfal of Pride* described the 'Rich Jewels, Diamonds, Chains of Shining Gold Embroidered Silks, and other Gems' worn by a merchant's wife, and paid for by her husband's overseas trade, who went to church merely to see and learn about new fashions from other women.⁶³ Such behaviour was apparently common, and moralists complained about it vehemently. Barnabe Rich claimed that 'there be a number of others that do rather freque[n]t the Church to see new fashions, than to gather good instructions ... rather to be seene themselves, than to seeke God'.⁶⁴ Susanna Jesserson thought women ought to be 'better employ'd at Church, then to observe who has the fittest Fab the best suits of Knotts, or the most glistering Pendants'.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 6 October 1661, ii, p.192; 25 June 1663, iv, p.199; 17 September 1664, v, p.273; 18 December 1665, vi, p.332.

⁶⁰ A. Marsh, *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage, Relating All the delights and contentments that are mask'd under the bands of Matrimony* (London, 1682), p.203.

⁶¹ Williams, *Sermon of Apparell*, pp.7-8, 11.

⁶² 'The Batchelor's Feast', *Roxburghe i*, p.50; 'The Cruel Shrow: Or, The Patient Man's Woe', *Roxburghe i*, p.95.

⁶³ 'The Downfal of Pride', *Pepys ii*, p.59.

⁶⁴ B. Rich, *The Honestie of this Age* (16??), p.23.

⁶⁵ Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors*, p.6.

Although dress was a shared female interest that could bring women together, as with beauty there could also be a highly competitive dimension. In *The Devil is an Ass* Lady Tailbush boasts that she will 'lead the fashion'.⁶⁶ Joseph Swetnam wrote that women spent 'most part of the forenoone painting themselves and frizling their haire, and prying in their glasse like Apes to pranck up themselves in their gaudies like Poppets', and alleged that 'amongst women she is accounted a slut that goeth not in her silkes'.⁶⁷ Barnabe Rich believed that a woman was 'ashamed to shew her face' and 'thinkes her selfe vnfit to conuerse with honest company' if she was out of the fashion.⁶⁸ 'A number of these new invented Gaudes that be now in use and custome, were first devised to please the appetites of such women, as were either of loose life or of loose wit, & afterwards becoming generall, were taken up & reputed for the new fashion', claimed Rich. 'Many women ... both good and gracious, are the more inclined to follow them the rather to avoid suspition, either that they are not able to support it as other women be, or otherwise to be accounted hypocrites and contumelious despisers of that which is received by all'. 'Nothing ... doth more greuously afflict her, then to see another womans gowns, more gawdy than her owne' Rich noted, claiming that women sought to assert their individual superiority over each other by wearing chains, jewels, 'silken gowns' and 'garded petticoates'.⁶⁹ One jest-book story described how the wives of Bedford 'stroue to exceed one another in braue Apparell' as each 'deemed herself the best woman that could get her garments made of the most finest and strangest fashion'. The draper's wife exceeded the other wives because of the fine satin stockings she wore whenever she went abroad, leading her to be 'talkt of almost in euery company'.⁷⁰ The author of *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* described how when young wives journeyed out of the capital 'they take all their best apparel with them, that their friends in the Country, may see all their

⁶⁶ Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, IV. ii. 15, p.290.

⁶⁷ Swetnam, *Araignment*, p.28.

⁶⁸ B. Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London, 1613), pp.18-19.

⁶⁹ Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, pp.41-43, 54.

⁷⁰ *Jacke of Dovers Merry Tales* (London, 1615), Sig. Br-v.

bravery'.⁷¹ Such anecdotes and tales suggest that there existed in opposition to the lessons of the moralists a female counter-code of honour that expected women to keep up to date with the latest fashions, and that encouraged great competitiveness.

Reconciling these two competing honour codes was difficult, and women (and some men) could be highly conscious of the fine line between what was deemed appropriate and what was extravagant. In December 1662 Pepys was 'in great pain that my wife hath never a winter gowne; being almost ashamed of it that she should be seen in a taffeta one when all the rest wears Moyre', and a couple of weeks later he was forced to buy Elizabeth a new gown. Although unhappy at the expense, he noted that 'it sets my wife and I to friends again'. Elizabeth was enthusiastic to follow the latest fashions. When she was in the process of making clothes for herself, she went with Samuel 'to Grayes Inne to observe fashions' and seek inspiration, and after they visited the Royal Theatre and saw many women wearing vizard masks, the couple went to the Exchange to buy one for Elizabeth. Keeping up with the fashions could yield positive results. When Elizabeth wore her 'Flower tabby suit' for the first time Pepys reported how 'everybody [was] in love with it'. However, spending too much on clothes was frowned upon, even at the social levels in which Samuel and Elizabeth mixed. Elizabeth was shocked when Mrs Pierce labelled her 'a gallante', claiming in her own defence that she had bought 'few suits of clothes these two or three years'.⁷²

However, concern for and knowledge of new fashions was not restricted to the wives of wealthy men. Margaret Spufford has shown that by the seventeenth century even domestic servants were part of a market for mass consumer goods.⁷³ For young women from modest social backgrounds, good clothes provided a means to impress friends, employers, and suitors, whilst for married women clothes offered an easy way to announce and assert their social aspirations. 'Euery artificers wife (almost), will not stick to goe in her hat of velvet euerye day, euery marchants wife and meane

⁷¹ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, p.58.

⁷² Pepys, *Diary*, 29 December 1662, iii, p.298; 9 January 1663, iv, p.10; 4 May 1662, iii, p.77; 12 June 1663, iv, p.181; 26 March 1668, ix, p.134; 6 August 1666, vii, pp.236-37.

⁷³ Spufford, *Reclotting*, p.4.

Gentlewomen in her french-hood, and euerye poore Cottagers Daughte in her taffatie hat, or els of woll at least, wel lined with silk, veluet or taffatie', Philip Stubbes complained, claiming that the daughters of yeomen, husbandmen, cottagers 'will not spare to flaunt it in such gownes, petticoats, & kirtles'. 'One can scarsly know who is a noble woman, who is an honourable or worshipfull Woman, from them of the meaner sorte' Stubbes moaned. 'In the Sommer-time, whilst floures be greene and fragrant, yee shall not haue any Gentlewoman almost, no nor yet any droye or puffle in the Cuntrey, but they will carye in their hands nosegays and posies of floures to smell at; and which is more, two or three Nosegayes sticked at their brests before'. 'For what cause I cannot tel' he added, 'except it be to allure their Paramours to catch at them, wherby, I doubt not, but they get many a slabbering kisse, and, paraduenture, more freendship besides'. Stubbes described women's fingers as 'decked with gold, siluer and precious stones, their wristes with bracelets and armlets of gold, and other preciouise Iewels: their hands are couered with their sweet washed gloues, imbrodered with gold, siluer, and what not' and he complained that women 'must haue their looking glasses caryed with them whersoever they go'.⁷⁴

Barnabe Rich believed that 'if the Prophet had now lately but walked one turne through the Royal Exchange in London, he would have beene put to his shiftes to haue made a true repetition of the new invented vanities, that are there to be seene' and 'could never have understood whereunto they had belonged, without the helpe of a chamber maide'.⁷⁵ Richard Flecknoe wrote of country girls dressed in 'fine white gloves' and 'tawdry lace, fring'd petticoat[s]' of spotless linen with 'Murrey stockin[g]s, and blew shooe-ties', hoping to attract young men.⁷⁶ Henry Peacham described how 'Ladies, and waiting women, will starve and shiver in the hardest frost, rather than they will suffer their bare Necks and Breasts to pass your eyes unviewed'.⁷⁷ The *Sermon Against Excess in Apparel* claimed that 'the proud and

⁷⁴ Stubbes, *Anatomie*, pp.69, 75, 78-79.

⁷⁵ Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, p.20.

⁷⁶ R. Flecknoe, *The diarium, or journall* (London, 1656), p.47. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for this reference.

⁷⁷ H. Peacham, *Worth of a Penny: Or, A Caution to Keep Money* (London, 1677), p.27.

haughty stomachs of the daughters of England' were 'maintained with divers disguised sorts of costly apparel', and that there was 'little or no difference in apparel between an honest matron and a common strumpet'.⁷⁸ *Advice to the Maidens of London* claimed that respectable young women had become as common as 'Billingsgate Women, and the Wenches that cryes *Kitchin-Stuff*' whilst the average 'Jillian and Dolly' could not be distinguished 'from those that are better descended'.⁷⁹

Women who dressed above their station offended moralists not only as a sign of extravagance, but because their behaviour threw the social order into confusion. A commentary on the decline of good housekeeping complained that 'you know not my Lady from her Maid' and mocked an everyday 'Jone Fiddle-Faddle, whose Portion amounts not to two Groats and two Pence' who would come from church 'deckt up with Ribbons and Towers as fine as a Bartholomew-Baby ... (whither she went only to shew her fine Cloaths) with a Swill-Pail in her hands serving of Hogs'. 'Now every Tom-Ladle and Jill-Flurt do so flaunt it with Towers, Ribbons, and other gew-gaws, that you do not know Jack from a Gentleman, nor Minks the Maid from her Lady or Mistress', the author complained, claiming that a man who married such a wife 'had far better to marry one made of Gingerbread, for when he is an-hungry she will serve to fill his Belly, and no more than need, for since so much is laid out upon the Tail, there is little Provision made for the Mouth'.⁸⁰ Barnabe Rich raised social and economic concerns when he complained that many women were unable 'to pay honestly for home-spunne cloth, will yet weare silke, and will every day glister in Gold and Silver' alleging that 'the soule goes every day in her working day clothes, whilst the body keepes perpetuall holy-day, and jets up and down in her severall suites'.⁸¹

⁷⁸ *A Sermon Against Excess of Apparel*, p.287.

⁷⁹ 'Advice to the Maidens of London: To Forsake Their Fantastical Top-Knots', *Pepys iv*, p.365.

⁸⁰ *Poor Robins Hue and Cry After Good House-Keeping* (London, 1687), pp.4, 6.

⁸¹ Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, p.18.

Blurring of social distinctions through dress concerned contemporaries greatly. When Hester Wainwright was indicted for stealing clothes from a gentlewoman in St Andrews parish in Holborn she alleged 'that she took them up amongst her own Cloaths, and knew not but that they were her own till she came to open them'.⁸² Hester was found guilty, but evidently considered that the court would believe that elite and plebeian female clothing might be easily confused. There was an element of truth in this, since maids who received items handed down from their mistresses, or who invested their wages in good clothes, could often be mistaken for women of a higher social rank.⁸³ When Captain Herbert asked Pepys who the woman in the black dress was that he had seen with Elizabeth, he refused to believe it was her maid, Mary Mercer.⁸⁴ Employers had mixed feelings about such situations. Although they wished to maintain the correct social hierarchy, they could take pride in having genteel servants who helped confirm their exalted status.

Women had various motives for wanting to dress above their station. For many the desire to acquire a good husband would have been high on the agenda, and men were told to take note of what women wore. 'It is convenient that he that will be a suter to a woman, that he marke what apparel she customarily useth to weare', noted Robert Cleaver.⁸⁵ Sarah Jinner advised 'Sea-men that are of any repute and credit, that intend Wedlock, not to look so low as the blew Apron, but [to] have higher thoughts'.⁸⁶ One pamphleteer commended women who invested in expensive clothes, claiming that 'to go brave is the only way to get them Husbands'.⁸⁷ The author of *The Confession of the New Married Couple* claimed that some young women spent so much on 'gaudy apparel' to entice lovers that they severely diminished their parents'

⁸² OBP, 6 September 1682, t16820906-2.

⁸³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.151.

⁸⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 22 September 1665, vi, p.238.

⁸⁵ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.107.

⁸⁶ S. Jinner, *An Almanack and Prognostication for the year of our Lord 1659* (London, 1659), Sig. B3r.

⁸⁷ *Poor Robins Hue and Cry*, p.4.

estates.⁸⁸ Single women in ballads also believed that clothes aided their attempts to get husbands. The heroine of *The London Lasses Lamentation* wore silks and bought every new fashion because she was 'loth to dye a Maid', and in *The Downfal of Pride* the eldest daughter of a London merchant dressed 'like a peacock fine and gay' to attract a wealthy husband.⁸⁹ Some balladeers tried to reassure their female readers, often young and poor spinsters, that fine clothes were not the way to a man's heart. *The Maidens New Wish* shows a cobbler threatening to leave the heroine, Joan, because she is 'addicted so to pride'.⁹⁰ However, although some ballads played down the importance of good clothes by suggesting that alone they would not guarantee a husband, the majority of songs emphasised that good clothes put women at an advantage in the marriage market.

Clothes given as courtship gifts were an acceptable and established aspect of early modern culture and tradition. Ballads depicted maids dressed in 'gawdy array' and 'sweet fragrant flowers' receiving ribbons and laces from their suitors on May Day, and bridegrooms promising to deck the heroines in gold and jewels, clothe them 'of the fashion' in 'gallant sutes', and allow them to spend money 'with the bravest'.⁹¹ In *Good Sir, you wrong your Britches* one suitor offers a silk gown, petticoat and a kirtle with silver lace and gold stitches to the girl he admires, and In *Faithful Inflamed Lover* a suitor offers treasure and pearls to his beloved, whilst more unusually *A Most Pleasant Dialogue* shows the girl offering jewels, rings, gold and treasure to a young man she wishes to marry.⁹² Barnabe Rich believed that matters had gone too far, and

⁸⁸ A. Marsh, *The Confession of the New Married Couple, Being the Second Part of the Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (London, 1683), p.24.

⁸⁹ 'The London Lasses Lamentation: Or, Her Fear She should never be Married', *Pepys* iii, p.239; 'The Downfal of Pride', *Pepys* ii, p.59.

⁹⁰ 'The Maiden's New Wish', *Pepys* iii, p.88.

⁹¹ 'The Dairy-Maids Mirth and Pastime on May-Day', *Pepys*, iii, p.201; 'Here begins a pleasant song of a Mayden faire', *Pepys* i, p.244; 'The Maidens Nay, Or I love not you', *Pepys* i, p.298; 'The Despairing Maiden Revived by the Return of her Dearest Love', *Pepys* iii, p.181.

⁹² 'Good Sir, you wrong your Britches, Pleasantly discoursed by a witty Youth, and a wily Wench', *Pepys* i, p.280; 'Faithful Inflamed Lover: Or, The true Admirer of Beauty', *Pepys* iii, p.192; 'A most pleasant Dialogue: Or A merry greeting between two lovers, How Will and Nan did fall at strife, And at the last made man and wife', *Pepys* i, p.311.

that although it had been ‘a happy age when a man might have wooed his wench, with a paire of Kiddeslether Gloves, a Silver Thimble, or with a Tawdry Lace’, now ‘a velvet gowne, a chaine of pearle, or a coach with foure horses, will scarcely serve the turne’.⁹³

Women responded to gifts in various ways. Some avoided accepting anything with emotional, sexual, or marital connotations, and if they did so inadvertently either suggested they had been duped or attempted to pay for the gift.⁹⁴ Other women gave unintended significance to such items, or used them for seduction and bribery.⁹⁵ The meanings of courtship gifts and tokens were thus ambiguous, and much depended on how and when items were delivered and accepted. Canon law provided no definitive answers to the meanings of gifts and tokens, and regional variations in the everyday significance of such items made matters deeply problematic, particularly in a city of migrants. Exchanges were personal and private, public and legal, and gifts of clothes sometimes concealed other items of significance in courtship, such as rings and coins. Women gave clothes and embroidered textiles as gifts before and within marriage, but more often were the recipients, and their responses determined whether a relationship continued or concluded.⁹⁶

Within spousal litigation purchasing wedding clothes was generally believed to signify a serious intent to marry. William Ashwell deposed that Elizabeth Essex had reported to him that Robert Finch had promised to marry her if he could get five pounds to buy clothes for her.⁹⁷ When they contracted marriage in 1566 Elizabeth Cook gave John Purfidge a new year’s gift of a black silk purse and he gave her seven

⁹³ Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, p.19.

⁹⁴ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.159-64.

⁹⁵ M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.197-99, 267, 274, 283.

⁹⁶ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), pp.263-66; D. O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000), pp.57-98.

⁹⁷ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 113r.

handkerchiefs.⁹⁸ Often such gifts were worn in public to display their acceptance and symbolism. Ester Sowernam explained that a man 'weareth in his hat, or on his brest, or upon his arme, the Glove, the Scarfe, or Ring of his Mistresse' and asserted that 'if these were not relickes from Saintly creatures, men would not sacrifice so much devotion unto them'.⁹⁹ Joseph Swetnam observed the same custom but disapproved, claiming that 'some thinke that if a woman smile on them she is presently head and eares in love [and] must weare her glove ... garter ... [or] coulers of delight'.¹⁰⁰

It was quite common for women and men to wear some small gift as a public mark of the affection between donor and recipient. When Robert Costardine noticed his wife wearing a ribbon about her arm as they sat in a London victualling house he asked her whose favour it was, whereupon she responded angrily that it was 'none of the pockie whore's favour Edith Bourne of whom you got the poxe and are ready to drop'.¹⁰¹ Evidently both spouses were unhappy in the marriage, and appear to have been using favours to signal the existence of another attachment to each other, and perhaps their friends and neighbours. Johan Jennings confessed to keeping company with Thomas Johnson, a married man from Smithfield, and when she was searched at the Bridewell hospital a string was found on her arm, which she admitted Johnson had given her.¹⁰² In this case the favour was a private rather than a public affirmation of her affections.

Gifts were frequently exchanged between individuals in the same household, often as part of the courtship process. Thomas Wilson gave various presents to his fellow servant Alice Graye, including three pairs of gloves and a pair of slippers.¹⁰³ Ann Jones, servant to Sir John Pagendon, told how Alice Barncham, her mistress and

⁹⁸ GL MS 9056, fo. 36v.

⁹⁹ E. Sowernam, *Ester hath hang'd Haman: Or An Answere to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignment of Women* (London, 1617), p.23.

¹⁰⁰ Swetnam, *Araignment*, p.32.

¹⁰¹ LMA DL/C/235, fo. 279v.

¹⁰² GL MS 33011/5, fo. 3r.

¹⁰³ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 20r.

the daughter of Pagendon's wife, exchanged gifts with Adam Jones, another servant. Alice gave Adam a pair of cuffs, and he gave her half a crown in gold. When Alice lost one of her garters Adam bought her a new pair, an action witnessed by one of Alice's sisters who told her father. Adam was dismissed, but the relationship seems to have continued as Adam wrote to Alice and sent her another piece of gold.¹⁰⁴ The apprentice John Todd kept a young woman in Covent Garden, and was alleged to have spent between forty and fifty pounds on clothes and other things for her. However, he was also a gambler, and after losing at hazard one evening John pawned the girl, who was forced to leave her petticoat behind as security.¹⁰⁵ Clothes were also given by women as presents for family members. Widow Lambert received five shillings from the churchwardens of St Benet Paul's Wharf 'towards the making up of some cloathes for her little grandchild William Smith'.¹⁰⁶

Once married, ballads sometimes suggested that women would have all the clothes they desired. One heroine dreamed that she would wear 'rich Comets fine and gay' and 'silks and satins...bedeck'd with Jewels, Diamonds, Pearl' after she was married, whilst another young woman married a kind husband and was 'attyred in garments most brave'.¹⁰⁷ Such ballads were appealing to female fantasies, though for a lucky few the fantasy came true. Rebecca Langford left Norbury in Staffordshire to go to London 'somewhat bare in apparel', but she returned 'very well apparelled and brought with her a very proper man'.¹⁰⁸ A more limited transformation was quite common following marriage. Women's clothing would alter to signify their change in marital status, with the acquisition of a distinctive scarf and hood.¹⁰⁹ Catherine Richardson argues persuasively that marriage was one of the few occasions when a

¹⁰⁴ GL MS 33011/5, fo. 12r.

¹⁰⁵ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.102-03.

¹⁰⁶ GL MS 877/1, fo. 167.

¹⁰⁷ 'The Maiden's New Wish', *Pepys* iii, p.88; 'Give me the Willow-Garland; Or, The Maidens Former Fear, and Latter Comfort', *Pepys* iii, p.94.

¹⁰⁸ P. Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (London, 1983), p.149.

¹⁰⁹ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.131.

middling sort woman had the opportunity to choose a whole wardrobe for herself, fashion a 'wifely' identity, and 'construct a model of appropriate behaviour in cloth'. Marriage, she suggests, provided women with 'a reclothing, a new identity as one half of a partnership'.¹¹⁰ At this crucial point in the lifecycle women could therefore expect a 'decent' outlay for new clothes, and society expected it as well. If it failed to materialise, instead of the usual preoccupation with extravagance, the parsimony of those responsible might be criticised. Samuel Pepys described Mrs Turner telling him how the parish was talking of how Sir William Penn clothed his daughter so poorly so soon after her marriage.¹¹¹ Penn's failure undermined his own credit as well as his daughter's; he was either unable to maintain the style appropriate to his rank or ignorant of what honour required.

Despite the expense, married women believed they had a moral right to be dressed according to their station, and that it was the responsibility of their husbands to provide appropriate clothes. Men faced criticism for being unable or unwilling to meet such obligations.¹¹² Catherine Barnaby defamed Grace and John Dickenson in numerous ways, including alleging that John had been reduced to buying 'a piece of stolen stuffe to make his wife a gowne'.¹¹³ The bad husband was one whose 'first business after Marriage, is to pay Alehouse-scores with his wives Portion; and his next to pawn her Clothes for supplies of fresh Debauchery'.¹¹⁴ But men might also be criticised if they allowed their wives to overspend on 'gawdy apparall', whether through over-indulgence or because they thought their wives' finery might reflect their own status and wealth.¹¹⁵ Donald Lupton warned merchants to keep their wives from the upper rooms of the Exchange 'least they tire their purses by attiring

¹¹⁰ Richardson, 'Havying nothing upon hym', pp.217-18.

¹¹¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 1 April 1667, viii, pp.141-42.

¹¹² Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.75.

¹¹³ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 175r.

¹¹⁴ *A Scourge For Poor Robin; Or, The Exact Picture of a Bad Husband* (London, 1678), p.5; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.215.

¹¹⁵ 'A Mad Crue; Or, That shall be tryde', *Pepys i*, p.445.

themselves'.¹¹⁶ When Barbary Sheldon visited Samuel Pepys shortly after her marriage she was dressed 'mighty rich in rings and fine clothes, and like a lady'. Samuel was happy for Barbary, but her appearance made him 'wonder at her good fortune and the folly of her husband'.¹¹⁷ *Jacke of Dovers Merry Tales* told of 'a iolly lusty olde man' who found himself five pounds out of pocket. He went to the mayor of Bedford 'to get some abatement', but the mayor would grant him no money because he knew how the man kept his wife 'in brauery beyond other women'. The husband begged the mayor for help, explaining how 'my good daies be past; and now because I cannot please her aboue the knee, I must needs please her beneath the knee'.¹¹⁸ The ballad *Constance of Cleveland* told how the wife of a young knight 'did him daily fleece of his wealth and store', spending time trying on fashionable clothes. Questions over the proper level of expenditure and who controlled the purse strings surfaced regularly in both literature and life, and discontented wives often used verbal and behavioural weapons to get their own way. *The Batchelor's Feast* mocked husbands who had to provide so many fine clothes for their wives, relating how:

The taylor must be payd
For making of her gowne,
The shoemakers for fine shooes, —
Or else thy wife will frowne.¹¹⁹

Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys were always negotiating about how much money he would allow her to spend on clothes. In 1660 Samuel gave Elizabeth fifty shillings to purchase a petticoat, but she returned to tell him that she had bought 'fine cloth of 26s per yard and a rich lace' costing five pounds in total. Samuel was 'somewhat troubled; but she doing it very innocently ... could not be angry'. The next day he saw the dress and acknowledged it was of 'a very fine cloth and a fine lace ... but that being of a light colour and the lace all silver, it makes no great show'. In 1662

¹¹⁶ D. Lupton, *London and the Country and Quartred into severall Characters* (London, 1632), p.25.

¹¹⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 24 August 1666, vii, pp.258-59.

¹¹⁸ *Jacke of Dovers Merry Tales*, Sig. Bv-B2r; cf. Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.198.

¹¹⁹ 'Constance of Cleveland', *Pepys* i, p.138; 'The Batchelor's Feast', *Roxburghe* i, p.50.

Elizabeth and Samuel were shopping in the New Exchange when Elizabeth spotted 'some new fashion pettycoates of sarcenet, with a black broad lace printed around the bottom', but these were not purchased. In 1664 fashion rather than money was at stake when they fell out because Samuel was unwilling 'to have her have her gown laced, but would lay out the same money and more on a plain new one'. Elizabeth 'flounced away', and later told Samuel 'in spiteful manner, like a vixen and with a look full of rancour, that she would go buy a new one and lace it', make him pay for it, and let him burn it if he wished. A few days later when Samuel was summoned home to view the gown he had changed his opinion. 'It becomes her very nobly and is well made', he noted, 'I am much pleased with it'. In 1665 Samuel allowed Elizabeth twenty pounds 'to lay out in clothes against Easter', a key point in the fashion calendar, which she spent on 'a new suit of Flowered ash-coloured silk' and a 'new Lace whiske', both of which Pepys described as 'very noble'.¹²⁰

At the beginning of 1669 Samuel 'did hang off' from providing his wife with any money for clothes, which vexed Elizabeth and led to 'discontented talk' until he agreed to give her an annual allowance of thirty pounds 'for all expenses, clothes and everything'. Elizabeth was 'mightily pleased', but the disputes about clothes did not end. When William Batelier arrived from France with a selection of perfumed gloves for Elizabeth to choose from Samuel thought them all too big, but Elizabeth insisted on buying dozens of pairs, angering Samuel so much that she backed down and took only what he 'thought fit'. Pepys estimated that he and Elizabeth owed Batelier twenty-two pounds, but was untroubled since they had bought 'things that are not trifles, but clothes, gloves, shoes [and] hoods'.¹²¹ His evaluation of what constituted appropriate clothing for Elizabeth was therefore based on a combination of style, fashion, decorum, and cost.

Samuel commented both positively and negatively on Elizabeth's clothes. He approved of her 'black sarcenet and yellow petticoat', 'slashed wastecoat' and 'green

¹²⁰ Pepys, *Diary*, 18-19 August 1660, i, pp.224-25; 15 April 1662, iii, p.65; 27 March 1664, 3 April 1664, v, pp.84, 110; 1 March 1665, 9 March 1665, 12 March 1665, vi, pp.48, 53, 55.

¹²¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 3-4 January 1669, 25 January 1669, 17 February 1669, ix, pp.406, 427, 453.

petticoate of flowered satin with fine white and black gimp lace', describing them as 'very pretty. However, such positive attitudes were not always forthcoming. Pepys fell out with Elizabeth 'about her ribbends being ill-matched, and of two colours', and the confrontation rose 'to very high words', leading Samuel to call Elizabeth 'whore', for which he apologised later. When the couple were about to go to church Samuel became angry because Elizabeth was not 'dressed as I would have her'. Pepys was also unimpressed when Elizabeth cut away 'a lace hankercher so wide about the neck, down to her breasts almost, out of a belief ... that it is the fashion', and was angered to arrive home and find his wife wearing 'a silly dress, of a blue petticoat uppermost and a white satin waistcoat and white hood'. Sometimes the couple compromised, such as when Samuel gave Elizabeth money to buy lace on condition that 'she promised to wear no more white locks'.¹²² Disagreements about what clothes Elizabeth could buy and wear suggest that neither spouse dominated the other completely. Samuel was as aware as Elizabeth that good clothes mattered, but they disagreed about whether the latest fashions were appropriate, and how much she should be allowed to spend.

If husbands would not provide clothes for their wives women might use other means to get what they wanted, including taking lovers. Tales of cuckolds described wives sleeping with other men in exchange for clothes, and such tales struck a double blow against the cuckold, showing him to be unable either to satisfy his wife sexually, or to raise the money needed to provide her with clothes. *The Catalogue of Contented Cuckolds* depicted a tailor confessing that his wife was sleeping with a salesman who had given her a silk gown.¹²³ In *Bartholomew Fair* Knockem seeks to persuade Win to prostitute herself by offering her clothes and telling her that 'it is the vapour of the spirit in the wife, to cuckold, nowadays'.¹²⁴ Particular symbols on clothes signified immorality. *The Discontented Married Man* depicted an adulterous wife with roses

¹²² Pepys, *Diary*, 18 May 1662, 2 June 1662, 29 June 1662, iii, pp.85, 99, 125; 19 December 1661, ii, p.235; 15 June 1662, iii, p.110; 22 November 1666, vii, p.379; 22 March 1667, 12 May 1667, viii, pp.124, 211.

¹²³ 'The Catalogue of Contented Cuckolds', *Roxburghe* ii, p.482.

¹²⁴ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, IV. v. 31-32, 42-46, p.572.

on her shoes 'to shew she's fit for pleasure' and in *The Devil is an Ass* Ambler tells Meercraft that he gave a gentlewoman garters and shoes with a pair of roses on them in return for sex.¹²⁵

Ballads often told stories about women exchanging sex for clothes, but not all of them were jocular tales of bold wives and cuckolded husbands. In *Laugh and Lie Down* a poor woman agrees to sex in return for 'a goodly black hood and a gallant serge gown'. In *The Gowlin* a beggar wench 'fit to do the thing' receives a gold ring, and in *The Maidens Melancholy Moan for the Loss of her Virginity* the baker's man 'Smerking John' offers the heroine a muff and fan if she would 'but once be kind'.¹²⁶ Similar behaviour was recorded in the Bridewell court books, such as that of a brewer from Southwark named Birde who approached Joane Clement in Cheapside, gave her money to buy a pair of shoes, and offered her a new petticoat if she would have sex with him. Joane resisted his advances, but other women ignored the risks of being defamed as whores and benefited from such transactions. Thomasine Breame was particularly successful in this respect. By selling her body she was able to procure various clothes, including a petticoat from Mr Kingeston, a silk taffeta gown from Timothy Fielding, a morning gown from an unnamed married man, and a gown gilded with velvet, a velvet cape, and a plume of feathers from Mr. English. Thomasine was so successful at gaining clothes that she passed on one gown to her maidservant Anne Jervis.¹²⁷ Samuel Pepys gave Mrs Daniel eight pairs of gloves after he had forced her to 'tocar my prick con her hand'.¹²⁸ In this instance the gift may have been an attempt by Samuel to reconstruct an act of sexual exploitation as a business transaction. One jest depicted 'a Pretty Wench but lately come out of the Country in her Pole-davis and Linsiwoolsy Petticoats, living in the Strand' who 'was seen not long after in her Silks and Sattins'. When asked by one of her Countrey women how such clothes could be

¹²⁵ 'The discontented Married Man', *Roxburghe* i, p.298; Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, V. I. 43-44, p.312.

¹²⁶ 'Laugh and lie Down: Or, A Dialogue', *Pepys* iii, p.35; 'The Gowlin: Or, A Pleasant Fancy for the Spring', *Pepys* iii, p.108; 'The Maiden's Melancholy Moan for the Loss of her Virginity', *Pepys* iii, p.68.

¹²⁷ GL MS 33011/3, fos. 5r, 13v-14r, 21r, 27v.

¹²⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 25 March 1668, ix, p.132.

purchased she replied bawdily 'onely for taking up'.¹²⁹ *Advice to the Maidens of London* depicted fashion as a vice that caused women to 'mortgage their secret Creature' to afford a Topknot hairstyle. High fashion was described as 'Ranting Attire', and the godly ballad concluded that pride would be the downfall of vain women since God's providential wrath would fall upon them.¹³⁰

Unsurprisingly moralists were deeply concerned by such developments. 'How many young Worthies will pawn their Honesty to maintain their Finery, and to make their Tail fine, will make use of their Tail, although they be whipped for it at the Carts Tail[?]' asked one pamphleteer.¹³¹ 'How they come by [these clothes] ... they care not', moaned Philip Stubbes. 'Who payeth for it they regard not, nor yet what hurt booth to them selues and others it dooth bring, they feare not'.¹³² Barnabe Rich told his readers to watch for a woman 'sumptuous in apparel, that doth shine in silke, in silver, and in gold, that is deckt with Gems, and jewels, that be rich and precious' and asked them to 'looke into her ability, is she able to pay for them, doth she not exceed the limits of her degree and calling?'.¹³³

Many people followed Rich in being suspicious of young single women who wore expensive clothes. Elizabeth Pepys was troubled when she heard of Deb Willett 'being mighty fine', and suspecting she had 'a friend that gives her mooney' accused Samuel of paying for her finery.¹³⁴ Blanch Thomas was suspected of having robbed her master due to 'her buying her Clothes and other things of a sudden'.¹³⁵ If women were questioned in court about their attire, they had to explain how they had acquired their garments, and those unable to provide adequate explanations were treated with suspicion.¹³⁶ Honour Lloyde, a spinster from St Martin in the Fields and 'a Woman

¹²⁹ A. Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet of Witty Jests, Rare Fancies and Pleasant Novels* (London, 1665), p.84.

¹³⁰ 'Advice to the Maidens of London: To Forsake Their Fantastical Top-Knots', *Pepys* iv, p.365.

¹³¹ *Poor Robins Hue and Cry*, p.7.

¹³² Stubbes, *Anatomie*, p.69.

¹³³ Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, p.54.

¹³⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 18 December 1668, ix, p.395.

¹³⁵ OBP, 17 January 1681, u16810117-14.

¹³⁶ For examples see Earle, *City Full of People*, pp.254-55.

of ill fframe', was bound over 'for living in a suspitious manner out of Service, goeing in rich cloathes (as Taffaty Gownes and Petticoats laced with gold and Silver lace)'. Honour could not provide a satisfactory answer as to how she got the clothes, and it was unlikely they had come from her father who got his living by carrying water on his shoulders. Some 'lewd idle wenches' out of service were brought in on the same day, who were said to 'goe gallant in apparel and yet can give no good accounte howe they came by them nor of their life and conversation'. Elizabeth Barefoot of St Martin in the Fields was brought in on 18 August 1653, described as 'a person that weares rich apparell and can give no good account of her livelihood'. The previous month Mary Holland was brought in for being 'a person that weares rich apparrell not having any estate' and was accused of 'frequenting houses suspected of bawdry'.¹³⁷ In these cases the implication was the women had obtained their clothes unlawfully, perhaps by selling sex.¹³⁸

Clothing was part of a moral vocabulary in which its physical proximity to the body could be translated into something else through analogy and euphemism. The nature of human interactions was defined by what people wore and how they wore it. Clothing in disarray invited contempt, suggesting a woman had no sense of decorum in dress. Mrs Turner told Pepys that Lady Penn had once been 'a dirty slattern, with her stockings hanging about her heels'.¹³⁹ Disordered clothes also invited suspicion, for example if a woman was found with a man who was not her husband in a room in a state of semi-undress.¹⁴⁰ For many people the manner in which clothes were worn and their location in unexpected places indicated illicit and intimate relationships.¹⁴¹ Robert Milner described how he had seen James Robinson and Sibell Hampton in a

¹³⁷ LMA MJ/SR/1096, items 59, 63; LMA MJ/SR/1111, item 49, 79. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for these references.

¹³⁸ For more examples see Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.192, 194, 230.

¹³⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 21 May 1667, viii, p.227.

¹⁴⁰ Richardson, 'Havying nothing upon hym', pp.213-14, 218-21.

¹⁴¹ Walker, *Crime*, pp.58-59.

ditch part way between Stepney and Hackney, and spotted that James's pointes had been untied and Sibell's clothes ruffled. James claimed that Sibell and he had only been reading, but Robert believed this was a lie 'for yt he sawe that their bookes were both shutt'.¹⁴² Joane Medcalfe was taken in bed with Simon Warmyll, 'her clothes and smocke up above her middle naked'.¹⁴³ Margaret Browne described seeing Michael Ffludd cast Clement Underhill on the bed in her chamber and when 'he pluckt upp her clothes to her thighs she pluckt them upp higher (whereby this deponent sawe not only her hose being a seawater greene colour and also her bare thighs)'.¹⁴⁴ Catherine Barnsley told how Elizabeth Merrick had claimed Elinor Wright had been 'running up and downe the countrie' with a fiddler, and described how Elizabeth pulled up her own coats in a shameful manner, crying out 'buck or fuck me fidler'. Presumably the theatrics of Elizabeth were intended to mimic how she believed Elinor had behaved. Joane Shore defamed Mrs Shurlocke as a base jade who 'suffered a man [to] put his hand into her placket and she put hir hand into his codpiece'.¹⁴⁵ Even rustling clothes might draw attention to adultery.¹⁴⁶

The unusual location of items of clothing aided the discovery of the secretive relationship conducted by Robert Finch and Elizabeth Essex in the house of Robert's master, George Tabb. Robert's mistress, Anna, discovered Elizabeth's stomacher in Robert's room one December morning whilst making his bed, and also came across a neck cloth on the stairs leading up to Robert's room the following Whitsuntide. Anna returned the item to Elizabeth, who acknowledged it to belong to her. Another lodger, called Robert, found a neck cloth in his bed that he believed belonged to her.¹⁴⁷ It was not just the location or disarrangement of clothing that was believed to signify

¹⁴² GL MS 9057/1, fo. 184v.

¹⁴³ GL MS 33011/3, fo. 9r.

¹⁴⁴ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 23r.

¹⁴⁵ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 241v, 293r.

¹⁴⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.203.

¹⁴⁷ GL MS 9057/1, fos. 107v-108r, 121r-v. For further details about the relationship of Robert and Elizabeth see chapter 6 above.

sex. Stains or marks on clothes carried similar connotations, and the expression 'to give a woman a green gown' was a euphemism for rural sex.¹⁴⁸

In addition a woman's clothes were seen as almost part of her physical person, and to tear her clothes was to violate her person and destroy both her dignity and her physical integrity.¹⁴⁹ One jest compared a woman to 'a piece of old Grogam, always fretting'.¹⁵⁰ Male and female assailants would often try to tear off the head-clothes of a woman to shame and humiliate her. However, the meanings attached to pulling or tearing clothes differed according to the gender of the assailant and victim. Women and men were deemed to be attacking the identity and authority of an individual by targeting the clothes of members of their own sex, but when a woman attacked a man in such fashion she was deemed to be striking at his possessions not his person.¹⁵¹ Attacking and removing head clothes, particularly of a married woman, had powerful connotations, returning her to the status of a single woman, or reducing her to the level of a whore.¹⁵² Evan Floud abused Joan Forde by pulling her band in pieces, whilst Mary Wetherhead and her three female accomplices pulled off Mary Turner's apron and insulted her as 'a scurvy queane'.¹⁵³ Dorothy Foster fought Sara Pudlan in the fields and pulled off her head-clothes.¹⁵⁴ Thomas Williams was brought before the Bridewell governors 'for pluckinge Judeth Cornes hatt of her head in the street in the night and puttinge her in feare' whilst Elizabeth Clarke was accused of attempting to arrange the murder of Sir William Frogmorton because Sir William had come to her house 'much in drink' and pulled off her head-clothes.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p.112; cf. Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, IV. v. 84-86, p.574 where Knockem tells Ursula to open the wardrobes of such women 'and fit 'em to their calling' as whores with green gowns and crimson petticoats.

¹⁴⁹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.104.

¹⁵⁰ Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.36.

¹⁵¹ Walker, *Crime*, pp.42-43, 82, 90-91, 98, 214.

¹⁵² Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p.58.

¹⁵³ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.458; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.133.

¹⁵⁴ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 154r.

¹⁵⁵ GL MS 33011/9, fos. 14; OBP, 18 April 1683, t16830418-6.

Since few early modern English women wore drawers the female body could be exposed easily.¹⁵⁶ Richard Flecknoe suggested that female dress left little to the imagination, describing 'wenches in petticoats so short, and shorter Lockrum smocks' and quipping that 'thanks unto their scanty cloathing, you half their breech might see for nothing'. However, such clothing offended moralists, and Flecknoe commented that 'this geer may shortly be amended'. The 'new Reformers' sought

For petticoats t'appoint a measure,
That your young men with their peering,
Nor your old for all their leering,
Mayn't see so farre in maidens carriage,
As may chance to mar their marriage.¹⁵⁷

However, many men were attracted rather than shocked by the erotic nature of female dress and undress. Descriptions of women in smocks carried specific sexual connotations. The smock a woman wore continuously day and night became almost a second skin and references to such garments were a common metaphor for both licit and illicit sexual activity.¹⁵⁸ One jest depicted two men watching a handsome wench pass by in very poor clothes. One said to the other that 'it was a wonder to see such a Wench so bare', but the other replied that 'it was no wonder, for she was common'.¹⁵⁹ Another joke described a young gentleman as 'an old smock-hunter'.¹⁶⁰ In *The Alchemist* Abel Drugger tells Face of a rich young widow lodging near to him, and Face asks if she is a *bona roba*, suggesting she is either a well-dressed woman or a prostitute.¹⁶¹ In *Bartholomew Fair* Edgeworth equates whores and clothes when he

¹⁵⁶ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp.36-40.

¹⁵⁷ Flecknoe, *Diarium*, p.24.

¹⁵⁸ Walker, *Crime*, p.54.

¹⁵⁹ Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.58.

¹⁶⁰ *London Jests: or A Collection of the Choicest Joques and Repartees, Out of the Most Celebrated Authors Ancient and Modern. With an Addition of above One Hundred Never before Printed* (London, 1685), p.143.

¹⁶¹ Jonson, *Alchemist*, II. vi. 29-30, p.407.

offers Quarlous the sexual services of 'a silken gown, a velvet petticoat or a wrought smock'.¹⁶²

Men fantasised about women dressed in particular clothes. In *The Devil is an Ass* Wittipol tells Manly how Fitzdottrel keeps his wife 'very brave', is sordid and sensual, and 'in every dressing he does study her'.¹⁶³ *The London Lady* depicted a lusty waterman admiring the gloves and fan of a city girl.¹⁶⁴ One jest began with an erotic description of a maid washing clothes by the riverside, and how 'as she stooped many times her smock would cleave close to her Buttocks'.¹⁶⁵ When Samuel Pepys fell ill during the middle of the night shortly after Christmas in 1660 he called to the maid who ran 'up and down so innocently in her smock'. That Pepys recalled her scantily clad appearance suggests his thoughts about her were less than innocent. He was also impressed when he saw Knipp 'in her night gowne with no locks on, but her bare face and hair only tied up in a knot behind ... the comeliest dress that ever I saw her in', remembered 'pretty Nelly standing at her lodgings door in Drury-lane in her smock sleeves and bodice', and persuaded Madam Pennington to 'undress her head', so that she 'sat dishelvelled all night' sporting with him.¹⁶⁶ Women themselves took very different attitudes towards scantily dressed women. Catherine Baker defamed Christian Nevell as a 'button smock whore' intimating that Christian's clothes were undone, or at least might be worn in a manner that Catherine deemed whorish and sexually enticing.¹⁶⁷

The London vice trade offered further opportunities for men to indulge their fantasies by dressing prostitutes in specific clothes.¹⁶⁸ Thomasine Breame alleged that William Brake was 'a bawde to his own wife and keepeth her very brave', and

¹⁶² Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, II. iv. 46, p.522; IV. vi. 17, p.575.

¹⁶³ Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, I. iv. 16-18, pp.233-34.

¹⁶⁴ 'The London Lady Or, Wise and Wanton', *Pepys* iii, p.41.

¹⁶⁵ *Poor Robin's Jests*, pp.59-60.

¹⁶⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 27 December 1660, i, p.323; 17 August 1667, viii, pp.388-89; 1 May 1667, viii, p.193; 4 December 1665, vi, p.318.

¹⁶⁷ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 211r.

¹⁶⁸ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p.32.

that a gentlewoman named Jane lay at his house 'in a damask gown', inviting the Bridewell governors to consider whether she was a gentlewoman, and if not how she came by such a gown. Thomasine's knowledge of the early modern vice trade came from her participation within it, and she explained how one of her own clients had requested 'a gentlewoman all in silk'.¹⁶⁹ Frances Baker told how Mistress Hibbens had been her bawd at the Half Moon in Aldersgate Street, and that the previous December a client had fallen out with Hibbens and refused to pay because she had promised him a gentlewoman, and had then deceived him. Frances described how Hibbens would dress her in 'one suit of apparel or other either silk, or silk rashe or stuff gowns...and put on a white Holland smock with a durance petticoat or two of three yards of velvet'. The client refused to pay because he knew the clothes belonged to Hibbens and had seen through her deception. Frances told the court that Hibbens had several sets of clothing in her house and that

When any gentlemen do come to her house and be desirous of gentlewomen then she will send for such wenches as she is acquainted withal and will shift them from top to toe and put on such apparell as she thinketh the franknes[s] of the gentleman will be unto her and so she doth in like sort when any other sorts of people do come to her house she will array such wenches for them as she thinketh th[e]y wilbe in liberality towards her.

Some of the money prostitutes earned was reinvested in clothes. Elizabeth Brooke told how she earned three pounds by sleeping with several men, and that her mistress took the money given to her in order to 'buy her some apparel'. Similarly Margaret Carter described how her mistress, Agnes Miller, bought her a gown, hose, and staves with the money Margaret earned by having sex with 'divers gentlemen'. On one occasion Margaret received five shillings from a client and Agnes told her to spend the money on some hose and a pair of shoes.¹⁷⁰ Such investments were perhaps

¹⁶⁹ GL MS 33011/3, fos. 22v, 24r.

¹⁷⁰ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 48v, 64r, 66v.

calculated gambles to gain more clients, mirroring the actions of respectable single women who invested in expensive finery to attract husbands.

Such stories from the metropolitan vice trade support the concerns of authors who claimed that the clothes of prostitutes and gentlewomen were virtually identical. Barnabe Rich believed some women 'that of my conscience are both good and honest, and I am sure that they themselves are desirous so to be accounted', if judged on their 'light and gaudy attire' would appear 'to be more Curtizan like then euer was Lays of Corynth or Flora of Rome'.¹⁷¹ Rich explained that 'if we should judge of them by the show of their apparel, we might many times presuppose the virtuous yong women, to be a lascivious Curtizan [as] they are al alike attired in their coloured silkes, and they do so narrowly imitate the one the other, both in forme and fashion as they cannot be discerned but onely by behaviour'.¹⁷² 'You shall see some women goe so attired to the Church ... fitter in good faith, to furnish A B[awdy] H[ouse] than to preasse into the House of God', he complained. 'So bepainted, so beperiwigde, so bepoudered, so beperfumed, so bestarched, so belaced, and so beimbroidered, that I cannot tell what mentall virtues they may haue ... it is an hard matter, in the Church it selfe, to distinguish betweene a good woman and a bad'.¹⁷³ In *Bartholomew Fair* Alice the punk derides women such as Mistress Overdo 'that undo us, and take our trade from us, with your taffeta haunches', claiming 'poor common whores can ha' no traffic, for the privy rich ones' with 'caps and hoods of velvet call away our customers, and lick the fat from us'.¹⁷⁴ Robert Greene wrote more ambiguously of streetwalkers who would 'jet in rich-guarded gowns, quaint periwigs, ruffs of the largest size, quarter and half deep, gloried richly with blue starch'.¹⁷⁵

Clothes could therefore dishonour women, but could also earn them credit and respect. They aided female sociability, but were also a source of competition for

¹⁷¹ Rich, *Excellency of Good Women*, p.5.

¹⁷² Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, p.40.

¹⁷³ Rich, *The Honestie of this Age*, p.24.

¹⁷⁴ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, IV. v. 59-64, p.573.

¹⁷⁵ Cited in G. Salgado, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London, 1977), p.62.

many women, especially when it came to finding husbands. Dressing attractively mattered in the London marriage markets, and items of clothing and accoutrements carried value as courtship gifts and signifiers of betrothal. Moreover, they acted as indicators of marital and socio-economic status. Wives were supposed to be, and expected to be dressed to match the status of their husbands, and complained if this was not the case. By contrast plebeian single women who wore what were deemed to be expensive clothes were treated with suspicion and were suspected to have acquired such garments by illicit means, possibly by selling sex. How clothing was worn also mattered. Torn or disordered clothes suggested illicit sex and were perceived as being sexually enticing by both women and men. However, clothes were easily disarranged – hats knocked from heads and skirts lifted – so women were not always in control of how they presented themselves.

Women's clothes and female agency

Nonetheless there were numerous ways that clothes could empower women. On 10 August 1639 Margaret Michener fabricated a letter in the name of Christian Oxnerd to swindle clothes, textiles, and money from Christian's sister Ann. Margaret thanked Ann for a waistcoat that she had sent to Christian, and asked her to send 'a couple of smocks ready made or else as much Lockram as will make two very good and also a pair of stockings of a good civil colour'. In addition Margaret requested five shillings in cash 'and an apron to wear every day such a one as you shall think fit, for a gown I shall need none yet, for I shall have a morning gown'. She added that 'my linen is not good enough, it is found fault with, it is too course because I lye with my lady's daughter'.¹⁷⁶ Although the letter was a work of deception it provides several useful insights into women's attitudes to their clothes. Margaret's request for 'an apron to wear every day' reflects the need for women to have practical clothes for everyday chores, whilst her request for stockings of a 'good civil colour' and her comment that her linen was 'found fault with' for being too coarse reveals that both the colour and

¹⁷⁶ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, pp.69-70.

quality of female garments had specific connotations, and moreover that clothes affected female employment prospects.

Providing appropriate clothing to enable a young woman to enter service was an expensive business, but might be a worthwhile investment.¹⁷⁷ On 13 December 1659 Goody Marstone appeared before St Benet Paul's Wharf vestry to explain how she had cared for the orphaned daughters of the late Goody Tessy for around half a year. Marstone desired to put the eldest girl into service, but 'being a poore woman and not in a condition to do for the girls what she would' she craved 'the favour and good will of the vestry to give and allow her some thinge' so that she could provide the girl with clothes and other necessities for her accommodation, promising not to be a future burden on the parish. The vestry gave her twelve shillings.¹⁷⁸ It may have proved a good investment since fine clothes could transform both the appearance and prospects of a servant significantly. When 'a young Mayden, going to take a service' came to the house of Elizabeth James and asked pitifully for work as a servant, or to be allowed to stay as a border whilst she sought work in service elsewhere, Elizabeth allowed the girl into the house since she was 'a pretty young wench, and handsomely apparelled'.¹⁷⁹ When Samuel Pepys first saw Barker, the girl Mr Falconbridge had recommended to him, he deemed her 'poor in clothes, and not bred to any carriage'. However, less than a month later Pepys commented 'what a good pretty wench our Barker makes, being now put into good clothes and fashionable ... an example of the power of good clothes and dress', and when Barker left his service she took clothes with her worth at least ten pounds.¹⁸⁰

Employers often rewarded loyal servants with gifts of clothes. Samuel Pepys described how one girl, Besse, was given 'good new clothes' when she came to work for him, and claimed the girl had 'received the greatest love and kindness and good clothes' when she left his employment.¹⁸¹ However, such gifts could be problematic,

¹⁷⁷ Crawford, 'Clothing Distributions', p.159.

¹⁷⁸ GL MS 877/1, fo. 185; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.297.

¹⁷⁹ *Three Bloodie Murders* (London, 1613), Sig. Cr-v.

¹⁸⁰ Pepys, *Diary*, 27 September 1666, 18 October 1666, vii, pp.299, 329; 13 May 1667, viii, p.212.

¹⁸¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 20 August 1663, iv, p.282; 6 March 1665, vi, p.51.

and employers and employees resorted to the courts to resolve disputes about issues of ownership and meanings of gifts. One maidservant stood arraigned for stealing a hood from one of her master's neighbours, and confessed to finding it in her master's chamber and to wearing it 'a great while publically, being never question'd till she came to demand her wages'. The court decided 'there was more passion than matter in the Prosecution', and she was discharged.¹⁸² Other servants clearly exploited the generosity of their employers. Elizabeth Andrews asked to borrow a coat from her landlord, Richard Farrow, to wear whilst she mended her own clothes, and used it to convey various stolen items out of the house.¹⁸³ In other cases employers exploited their servants by giving or loaning clothes to them, for example if they required them to appear on their behalf in court and needed them to be well dressed to create a good and credible impression. Christian Stappleton wore a cloak and a taffeta gown when she came to give evidence to the consistory court on behalf of her mistress Jane Hope, but Emma Anstill claimed that Christian was 'so simple and voyd of reason as that she doth not know what an oath is or the danger of breaking an oath', alleging that Christian had received the cloak, gown, and hat from her mistress when she came to depose.¹⁸⁴

The failure of some employers to provide adequate clothing for female servants was also a cause of complaint. In 1610 Anne and Garrett Daye initiated a petition in the Court of Requests against James and Eleanor Meadows, who in 1602 had employed Anne as a servant. When she left their employ in October 1604 Anne claimed to have received neither wages nor any decent clothing 'by which means she was not then meet and fit for any other men's service of any worth'. Whilst she worked for the Meadows, Anne wrote to her father requesting money, and he sent her forty shillings through a cousin. However, the money was left with James Meadows, who never gave it her. In response James and Eleanor sought to discredit Anne by claiming that when she had first come to them in September 1601 to request a post in

¹⁸² OBP, 16 January 1678, t16780116-11; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.137-38.

¹⁸³ OBP, 14 January 1686, t16860114-15.

¹⁸⁴ LMA DL/C/231, fos. 159v, 161v.

service, she was dressed very poorly, having 'no more apparel than an old petticoat, one old waistcoat, two old torn smocks, and [several pieces] of old linen'.¹⁸⁵ The case shows how clothes mattered to both employers and employees, though in different ways. Female servants regarded clothes as being as much part of their working entitlements as bed and board, whilst for masters and mistresses, clothes provided the first, and often the only means to gauge whether a girl or woman was worth employing.

As has already been shown, clothing was related closely to female identity. Often women were recognised by their clothes. Katherine Townsend claimed she saw a gentleman leaving the house of Joyce Holloway in Chancery Lane at six o'clock in the morning and that she knew it was Joyce who let him out of the house because she was 'in her white wastcoat'.¹⁸⁶ In Islington George Allen was discovered to have murdered his wife because a family acquaintance recognised her clothes.¹⁸⁷ Even in London, a woman appearing in her best or different clothes was bound to attract the curiosity of her neighbours. Mary Snow noticed that when Francis Baker came to the house of her mistress, Elizabeth Hibbens, she was wearing a green waistcoat and a red petticoat, but having returned from an errand she was wearing a buffen gown and a durance petticoat. When Francis left the house again she had changed back into her original clothes.¹⁸⁸ Elizabeth Hazard tried to escape after murdering her grandchild and 'put on her best apparel and took six pound in her pocket' but her clothing 'made some of the neighbors marvel being working-day at her being so fine, whereupon one or two of them said good Morrow Gammer Hazard, you are very fine this morning, what are you going to the market this morning'.¹⁸⁹ Shortly before Joan Martin was

¹⁸⁵ M. K. McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.24-25.

¹⁸⁶ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 40r.

¹⁸⁷ *News from the Sessions. Or, The Whole Tryal of George Allen The Butcher Who Murthered his Wife in the Fields behind Islington, On Friday the 5th of the Instant February, And the manner how the same came to be Discovered* (London, 1675), p.4.

¹⁸⁸ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 62v.

¹⁸⁹ *The Unnatural Grand Mother* (London, 1659), p.7.

apprehended for stealing two coats and a pair of breeches in desperation she tried to conceal herself by pulling her hood over her eyes.¹⁹⁰

Good clothes enabled women to enter places they might otherwise have been denied access to. A husband and wife team of thieves were able to gain lodgings with a London citizen and steal a silver tankard and a large amount of money because the wife had pretended to seek lodgings 'for a person of honour' dressed 'in the Habit of a Gentlewoman'. Another woman 'pretending herself a substantial Gentleman's Wife' similarly obtained lodgings and stole a silver tankard.¹⁹¹ Alice Woodstocke told the Bridewell governors how Agnes Wilkinson had given her one of her gowns, and told her to change her name from Partridge to Woodstocke when she was to enter service with Mr Brooke.¹⁹² Sara Hayles of Covent Garden was brought before the Middlesex sessions for 'tearming herself by the name of Lady Hayles' and frequenting 'Brothel houses'.¹⁹³ Both cases seem to fit within the world of prostitution, whoredom, vice, and sexual fantasies that constituted a uniquely metropolitan sub-culture. But clothes also facilitated downward social mobility, enabling elite women to become 'cultural amphibians' and slum it as a frolic on the metropolitan streets.¹⁹⁴ Samuel Pepys recorded how 'Mrs Jennings, one of the Duchess's maids dressed herself like an orange wench and went up and down and cried oranges – till falling down, or by such accident ... her fine shoes were discerned and she put to a great deal of shame'.¹⁹⁵

Clothing was used both to mark social and economic distinctions between rich and poor, and to connect them in interdependent relationships. Decent clothes were badges of worthiness to demarcate the honest from the idle poor.¹⁹⁶ Donating clothes

¹⁹⁰ OBP, 9 December 1685, t16851209-18.

¹⁹¹ OBP, 14 January 1676, u16760114-6; OBP, 14 October 1680, t16801014-1.

¹⁹² GL MS 33011/4, fo. 8r.

¹⁹³ LMA MJ/SR/1111, item 50. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for this reference.

¹⁹⁴ 'Cultural amphibians' are discussed in P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Revised reprint: Aldershot, 1994), pp.23-29.

¹⁹⁵ Pepys, *Diary*, 21 February 1665, vi, p.41.

¹⁹⁶ S. Hindle, 'Dependency, Shame, and Belonging: Badging the Deserving Poor, c.1550-1750', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), pp.6-35.

offered individuals an opportunity to act charitably to their social inferiors, and to use the gifts to reflect their own social status relative to that of the beneficiary. However, if clothes were given to people of a similar social rank, then a reciprocal gift might be reasonably expected, and particular garments might have been considered appropriate gifts for specific groups or individuals. Clothing therefore became a form of symbolic capital, its value determined by the relationship between donor and recipient. Whilst some recipients may have valued personal items, the destitute probably preferred to receive practical items of clothing. Women were more likely to bequeath clothes to the poor, possibly because of the types of assets they owned. Testators rarely gave their own clothes to paupers, bequeathing them to family, friends, and neighbours instead, but on some occasions they gave cloth to be made into clothes for the poor.¹⁹⁷

Poor women also received clothes through parish and private charity. William Gorsuche left Mother Gregory of Hendon a 'poor gown' worth ten shillings, whilst Elizabeth Stevyns bequeathed clothing and rent to Mother Gam and Mother Draper. The relief given to Margaret Ludford by St Stephen Walbrook parish provided her with clothes, and the parish also redeemed her daughters' pawned clothes worth fifty shillings.¹⁹⁸ Agnes Wilkinson gave clothes to Barbara Allen because she had served her for six months and because 'she was somewhat of twin to her'.¹⁹⁹ The Bridewell governors frequently provided clothes as a form of relief for impoverished women, ordering that Jane Jones, 'a poore Girle' should receive clothes at Easter, and that Elizabeth Smith and Anne Hynde, 'taken vagrant and begging' should 'have some clothes' and 'have a smocke, shoes and stockings' respectively.²⁰⁰ When Henry

¹⁹⁷ S. Sweetinburgh, 'Clothing the Naked in Late Medieval East Kent' in C. Richardson (ed.), *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), pp.109-17.

¹⁹⁸ C. Schen, 'Strategies of poor aged women and widows in sixteenth-century London' in P. Thane and L. Botelho (eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), pp.15, 23.

¹⁹⁹ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 8r.

²⁰⁰ GL MS 33011/9, fos. 26, 31, 150.

Cruse and his wife took in Alice Baxter they clothed her and 'lent her money to buy cakes, and to sell them about the streets'.²⁰¹

One of the many values of clothes for women was that they could be turned into money in time of need, by selling or pawning them. The wife of a journeyman cooper living in Clerkenwell was 'compelled to sell some cloaths for a little money' to buy bread for her two children when her husband disappeared for several days.²⁰² When Jane Hattersley was thrown out of her lodgings, Goodwife King allowed her to take 'such things as were hers' except for a gown that she took in payment for arrears owed, and money due 'for some matter'.²⁰³ For particularly desperate women it was not only clothes that served this purpose. Elizabeth Raitt told how Catherine Conduit cut and sold her hair in order to buy shoes and other necessary items for her husband, Daniel.²⁰⁴ Women also used clothes as bribes. Joane Nevill offered George Morryce 'a good paire of gloves' if 'he would be a friend' and help deceive James Edwards.²⁰⁵

Markets for stolen clothes operated alongside and overlapped with legitimate ones, assisting the diffusion of fashionable attire through society. Children and well-dressed people had clothes stolen, lodgers and servants were both victims of theft and thieves, and shoplifting became a growing problem in the later seventeenth century.²⁰⁶ Women were twice as likely as men to steal household-related objects such as clothes and were often receivers of stolen clothes. Garthine Walker has argued that women had greater emotional attachments to clothes than men as such items were part of their everyday lives. Although clothes were part of the everyday lives of men too, among the middling and poorer sorts clothes counted more for women in terms of sexual attraction and social competition. Women also made greater reference to colour and

²⁰¹ OBP, 9 December 1685, t16851209-25.

²⁰² *Bloody News from Clerkenwell* (London n.d.), p.4.

²⁰³ T. B., *The Bloudy Mother, or The most inhumane murthers, committed by Iane Hattersley vpon diuers infants, the issue of her owne bodie & the priuate burying of them in an orchard with her arraignment and execution* (London, 1610), Sig. Bv.

²⁰⁴ Earle, *City Full of People*, p.185.

²⁰⁵ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 8r.

²⁰⁶ B. Lemire, 'The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England', *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1990), pp.255-76. On female shoplifters see Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.66-67.

adornment of clothes in their depositions. When clothes were stolen it was usually women who reported their loss, identified them, gave evidence, and entered into recognisances to prosecute offenders.²⁰⁷ Anne Gray and Judith Darly came before the Bridewell governors for luring a maid into a victualling house and cozening her of a petticoat, whilst Jane Hudnall was sent in for stealing a shirt from Jonne Hurley.²⁰⁸ Mary Knight assaulted Elizabeth Seamer in St. Paul's Shadwell and 'beat, wounded and maltreated [her] ... so that her life was despaired of', before stealing a silk scarf, a silk hood, a Scotch-cloth handkerchief and a pair of patterns from her. In St. Martin's-in-the-Fields Charles King assaulted Mary Matthews in the highway and robbed her of 'a Bengall gowne' and two hempen aprons.²⁰⁹ Joane Averie alleged one Mrs Fuller had taken a pair of her stockings, and in *The Alchemist* Dol boasts that she will cozen Dame Pliant of her jewels and bracelets.²¹⁰

Maidservants were involved frequently in the theft of clothes, both as perpetrators and victims. John and Margaret Legge broke into the house of Lady Susan Stanhope in St. Martins-in-the-Fields and stole smocks, coifs, handkerchiefs, bands, cuffs, and aprons belonging to Mary Newark, Lady Stanhope's servant.²¹¹ Elizabeth James took money and clothes from her maidservant, forcing the girl to ask her master for them to be returned.²¹² One young woman, employed at Wapping as the servant of a gentlewomen, was tried for stealing a 'Farrendon-gown' and other items from her mistress, but claimed in her defence that she had been ordered to sell the items.²¹³ Other domestic thieves sought to conceal their actions. Samuel Pepys

²⁰⁷ G. Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods' in J. Kermode and G. Walker (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), pp.87-93; id. *Crime*, pp.162-67. Alexandra Shepard is currently researching the significance of clothes in establishing the worth and credit of early modern women and men.

²⁰⁸ GL MS 33011/9, fos. 17, 99.

²⁰⁹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume IV*, pp.74, 142.

²¹⁰ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 10r; Jonson, *Alchemist*, V. iv. 73, p.473.

²¹¹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*, pp.85-86.

²¹² *Three Bloodie Murders* (London, 1613), Sig. Cv.

²¹³ OBP, 14 January 1676, t16760114-12.

recorded how his maid Susan returned to his household to look for a gorgett she believed she had left behind when she departed from his service. Hannah, the new servant, had found the gorgett, and was wearing it when Susan arrived, but 'shifted it off presently'. When Samuel told Hannah to return the item she got 'in a huff' and told Samuel and Elizabeth she would be gone that evening if they would pay her wages.²¹⁴

Clothes could also be used for concealment. When Jane Hattersley gave birth to an illegitimate child, she wrapped it in her apron to remove it from the house and murder it. Ann Price 'carried it so cunningly' when she became pregnant 'that no person in the house did in the least suspect her till she was delivered'. She gave birth alone and finding the child to be stillborn wrapped it in an apron and locked it in her box.²¹⁵ Jane Robinson stole a tankard from John Warren by concealing it under her scarf, and female shoplifters were able to smuggle away ribbons, silk stockings, and pieces of serge and calico in their aprons and petticoats.²¹⁶ However, the bulges in the clothing of thieves were often spotted. When a female repeat offender was tried for stealing from the house she lodged at in St Sepulchres' parish, the evidence against her included that 'immediately after [the theft] she was seen to come out of the house with a bundle or heap in her apron'. Walter Turner saw Thomazine Davies walking in the alley by his house 'with an Apron full of things'. Hearing Lewis Gastring come out of her house and complain that she had been robbed, Walter pursued Thomazine and found the items in her apron. The thieving of Jane Brown was discovered when she collided with someone in the street who heard the rattling of the plate concealed under her coat.²¹⁷ Equally, if women placed items in their pockets of aprons, this did

²¹⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 17 August 1663, iv, p.279.

²¹⁵ *Bloudy Mother*, Sig. Br-1pp; t16810413-1, 13 April 1681.

²¹⁶ OBP, 9 April 1684, t16840409-11; 13 December 1676, t16761213-5; 12 December 1677, t16771212-11; 25 April 1688, t16880425; 31 August 1688, t16880831-2.

²¹⁷ OBP, 11 October 1676, t16761011-11; 11 December 1678, t16781211e-32; 12 October 1687, t16871012-20.

not prevent them from being stolen. Ann Bland stole money from the apron pocket of a market woman in Hony Lane.²¹⁸ Such cases suggest that for ordinary women clothes possessed multiple values and significances.

Conclusion

The circulation of clothes, fabrics and threads between women comprised part of a female economy, and when the flow of such material was disrupted problems arose. Agnes Hoyle went to negotiate for more time to pay for a gown, despite the fact that her husband had bought it for her, suggesting that a woman's clothes were very much her own business.²¹⁹ Similarly, when Christian Nevell demanded that Catherine Baker return the stockings she had given her to mend, Catherine fell into a rage and defamed her as a whore, an attack on a woman's honour launched in a debate about women's things.²²⁰

Clothes were vital to determining the reputations of all women, whether they were married or single, rich or poor. What a woman wore acted as a sign conveying complex messages depending on how, when, and where she wore it. Contemporaries were always conscious of this fact, and adept at reading the coded language. Clerics taught that women should dress in a sober manner befitting the status of their husbands and, as with beauty, believed that outward appearance ought to signify inward virtue. However, due to the rapid circulation of clothes down the social order, to equate good clothes with reputable women was a questionable judgement. Women and men often had different beliefs about what women ought to wear. Women seeking employment needed practical and 'civil' clothes that they would use for going about their everyday work, but many women, especially of middling rank, also wanted more expensive and luxurious clothes to wear when going out with their husbands, boyfriends, and female friends. Keeping up with the latest fashions was

²¹⁸ OBP, 1 June 1682, u16820601a-4; cf. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p.54.

²¹⁹ GL MS 9056, fos. 20r-v.

²²⁰ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 211r.

important to impress other women, and single women believed they needed to dress well in order to find a husband. Men themselves were told to judge women by what they wore, and were clearly attracted to women in certain types of clothes. The provenance of clothes was vitally important in a market economy where the dress of disreputable whores and prostitutes might be indistinguishable from that of reputable women. Exchanging clothes as gifts could be dangerous since such actions carried strong symbolic connotations that were unclear and often contested. Nonetheless, gifts were important within courtship, and anyone wishing to marry had to be willing to participate in the exchange process.

Clothes possessed numerous benefits for women. Dressing well was vital in order for a woman to obtain work in service, and once in service women expected to receive clothes as a perk of the job. In times of need women could pawn clothes to gain ready cash, and some women used clothes as bribes. Women also attempted to use clothes to hide stolen goods, or conceal illicit pregnancies, with varying degrees of success. As women were recognised by what they wore, people noticed if they changed clothes for whatever reason. Moreover, clothes were valuable items that were often stolen by and from women.

Socially, economically, and culturally people placed a high value on clothes. They enabled women to fashion reputable identities, and aided their efforts to find spouses and employment. They might be used to enhance female beauty, or to make up for and conceal a lack of it. Beauty and clothes were central to how women presented themselves in everyday life, since both shaped impressions of the body. Yet honour was also determined by the roles and activities of women in families and households. When a woman became pregnant her ability to shape her body disappeared, and she began to be judged by different sets of criteria, to which we now turn.

3. Meanings of Motherhood

Introduction

Early modern women spent much of their adult lives bearing and raising children, and being a good mother helped a woman gain respect within and beyond her household. Motherhood was a socially and culturally constructed role that a woman carried out in the family, and that also connected her with friends and relatives outside the domestic environment.¹ The ability to reproduce thus formed part of a woman's social identity, as well as affecting perceptions of her physical body.² Motherhood was an individual and exclusively female biological experience, part of the lifecycles of many women, but it was also a role and a relationship that affected the development of both mother and child.³ Mothering was therefore not confined to biological mothers. Numerous other women were involved in delivering, breastfeeding, nurturing, and educating children, and such women were both idealised, and subject to constant scrutiny and criticism.⁴

Motherhood could therefore empower women. Margaret Ezell has suggested that historians should re-conceptualise patriarchal authority as 'parental' authority, and argued that the latter was invoked as frequently as the former because women played a major role in their children's lives as mothers.⁵ Although her basic conclusion that women held authority as mothers is accurate, underlying it is an assumption that men and women fulfilled identical parental duties, or at least always worked in tandem. In practice the roles that mothers and fathers were expected to

¹ A. Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History* (London, 1994), p.75.

² B. Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, translated by Thomas Dunlop (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1991), p.28.

³ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.148.

⁴ N. Miller, 'Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period' in N. J. Miller and N. Yavneh (eds.), *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the early modern period* (Aldershot, 2000), p.1.

⁵ M. J. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill and London, 1987), pp.34, 161.

fulfil, and perceptions of parental roles differed significantly according to gender, especially among the gentry and upper middling sorts.⁶ Fatherhood was as important and honourable as motherhood, but its social role differed in many ways. This chapter focuses specifically on what constituted acceptable motherly behaviour, examining the changing meanings of motherhood from before conception to when children reached adulthood. How did fertility affect women's reputations? What responsibilities did mothers have towards their children, and to what extent were they able to fulfil them? How did relationships between mothers and adult offspring develop once the daughter or son left home, and how did gender affect these relationships?

Anxious motherhood: fertility issues

Children conceived and born within marriage were for the most part welcomed, and valued in many ways: as divine blessings, for continuing the family line, and for the emotional satisfaction they gave to their parents. Biological urges compelled many women, and indeed many men, to want children, and children were perceived both as physical manifestations of spousal love and potential sources of help and support for elderly parents. Bearing a moderate number of children brought honour for a woman, and it was widely believed that parents lived on through their children. However, because motherhood had such positive connotations, many women were anxious about failing to conceive, or worried about having too many children.⁷ Lawrence Stone argued that women were anxious about repeated pregnancies and childbirth

⁶ On elite fathers see Fletcher, *Gender*, pp.297-321, 336-37; Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.91-93, 121-25; P. Crawford, 'Blood and Paternity' in id., *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 2004), pp.113-39. At present no study exists of plebeian fatherhood in early modern England or Britain. Thank you to Melissa Hollander for highlighting this point for me.

⁷ K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London, 1982), p.104; L. A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.204-05, 208-09; R. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London, 1984), p.127; A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), pp.51-67.

because of the lack of reliable contraception and low standards of medical care. According to Stone women often worried about whether they were pregnant, and if they were, whether the child would come to term, whether they would survive labour, and how they would feed their child, whilst women who were unable to conceive experienced feelings of guilt and inadequacy that created tensions in their marriages.⁸

If women had such anxieties they were not eased by the belief that almost all women between the menarche and the menopause were driven physiologically to desire children.⁹ Jane Sharp believed that ‘to conceive with child is the earnest desire if not of all yet of most women, Nature having put into all a will to effect and produce their like’. She observed there to be ‘in women so great a longing to conceive with child, that oftimes for want of it the womb falls into convulsions and distracts the whole body’. ‘Almost all men and women desire to be fruitful naturally’, Sharp asserted, considering it ‘a kind of self-destroying not to be willing to leave some succession after us’.¹⁰ In some cases, though probably a small minority, a sense of religious duty also made women want to become mothers. Elizabeth Joscelyn wrote how she had ‘longe often and earnestly desired of god that I might be a mother to one of his children’, and that her happiness at becoming a mother ‘consisted not in honor wealthe strengthe of body or frends’, nor the desire for an heir, or the hope of having a baby to hold and cherish. Joscelyn believed that ‘all the delight a parent can take in a childe is Hony mingled with gall’ and explained that she wanted a child so it might be ‘an inheritor of the kingdom of heauen’.¹¹ Her comments reveal that some women internalised church teachings, but Joscelyn’s religiosity was exceptional, and the

⁸ L. Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford, 1990), p.8.

⁹ P. Crawford, ‘The construction and experience of maternity’ in id., *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 2004), p.82.

¹⁰ J. Sharp, *The Midwives Book: Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered*, edited by E. Hobby (Oxford, 1999), pp.75-76, 128.

¹¹ E. Joscelyn, ‘Legacy’ in S. Brown (ed.), *Women’s Writing in Stuart England* (Stroud, 1999), p.109.

majority of women were likely to have wanted children for biological and emotional reasons.

Church teachings associated fertility and childbearing with female piety and respectability. Preachers and conduct-book writers used biblical references to argue that women were saved by childbearing, that cursed women were made barren, and that to prevent conception or provoke abortion was murder.¹² William Gouge argued that it was not necessary 'that a husband and wife should have a family to governe, for two may be married and have neither children nor servants (as many are) and yet be true husband and wife', but his advice was designed as a comfort for couples unable to conceive, rather than a recommended lifestyle choice.¹³ Most clerics emphasised the exact opposite. William Crompton wrote that 'a good woeman was never barren: she cannot but bee a mother of many children', and that the children of a good mother would 'rise up in token of her honour, and call her blessed'.¹⁴ Similarly, Matthew Griffith argued that 'it is God that must give an holy seed, and make a barren wombe to bee a fruitfull mother'.¹⁵ Robert Cleaver asserted that the primary aim of marriage was 'the procreation, begetting, & bringing up of children'. 'If they be well and virtuously brought up, God is greatly honoured by them, the common wealth is advanced, yea their parents and all other fare the better for them', he wrote.¹⁶

The message promoted by the Prayer Book and clergy, that a primary purpose of marriage was for procreation, harmonised with commonly held notions that female fertility was a highly-valued blessing. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* Lady Kix laments that she has been 'seven years a wife and not a child', whilst Mistress Allwit is admired for being a mother, more than for being a wife. 'I would not care what

¹² Crawford, 'Construction and experience of maternity', p.83.

¹³ W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), p.257.

¹⁴ W. Crompton, *A Lasting Jewel for Religious Women* (London, 1630), p.9.

¹⁵ M. Griffith, *Bethel: Or, A Forme for Families* (London, 1633), pp.116, 284.

¹⁶ R. Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1598), p.157.

clown my husband were too, so I had such fine children' one of the gossips declares.¹⁷ One 'merry dialogue' between husband and wife depicted the former telling the latter that although childbirth was painful, having a child would bring joy to a woman and praise from her gossips.¹⁸ 'What would not one undergo to be the Mother of so fine an Angel', asked the author of *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage*.¹⁹

With such an emphasis on procreation, it is unsurprising that infertility often caused disquiet between spouses. Although childlessness might be considered a slur on the sexual prowess of a husband, more frequently it was blamed on the woman, and barren wives lost respect, especially if the family line or issues of inheritance were at stake.²⁰ The advice offered in *The Devil is an Ass* by Mistress Tailbush, that 'receipts for proneness' should be looked for in a wife, suggests that infertility problems were perceived as being the fault of the woman.²¹ In 1658 Mary Yeao was slandered as a 'barren bitch' and 'barren jade', and in 1662 Anne Newton was bound over for calling Katherine Rich 'barren bitch' and whore, an accusation that created bad feeling between Katherine and her husband.²²

As the case of Katherine Rich suggests, not all women perceived fertility problems to be their fault. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* when Sir Oliver tells Lady Kix that she is barren and 'nothing of a woman', she responds that 'I was never called so till I was married', and claims her husband is 'scarce the hinder quarter of a man'. Sir Oliver threatens to divorce her and 'keep some fruitful whore' to provide him with

¹⁷ T. Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (London, 1613), II. i. 133-34; III. ii. 31-32 in R. Dutton (ed.), *Women Beware Women and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1999), pp.19, 33.

¹⁸ 'A Merry Dialogue betwixt a married man and his wife concerning the affaires of this carefull life', *Pepys i*, p.389.

¹⁹ A. Marsh, *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage, Relating All the delights and contentments that are mask'd under the bands of Matrimony* (London, 1682), p.151.

²⁰ Crawford, 'Construction and experience of maternity', pp.91, 93; L. Pollock, 'Embarking on a rough passage: The Experience of Pregnancy in Early Modern Society' in V. Fildes (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 1990), pp.39-41.

²¹ B. Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass* (London, 1631), IV. iv. 233 in J. Kidnie (ed.), *The Devil is an Ass and Other Plays* (Oxford, 2000), p.303.

²² LMA MJ/SR/1187/75; LMA MJ/SR/1187/424; LMA MJ/SR 1260/276. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for these references.

children, telling his wife that if she were to adopt 'friendlier courses' she would find it easier to conceive. Lady Kix responds by shifting the blame back on to Sir Oliver. 'Had you been ought, husband, it had been done ere this time' she tells him.²³ Other women were also keen to emphasise that procreation was very much a joint effort. In *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* one gossip describes her husband as being 'not half so hot in the codpiece' after the birth of their first child, but another woman tells how although her husband did not have sex with her for a fortnight after she was out of childbed, when they resumed conjugal relations 'he did so claw and tickle her fancy' that nine months later she gave birth to twins.²⁴ Evidently women were keen to acknowledge that men had equal responsibilities in the business of procreation, if only to deflect accusations of infertility from themselves.

Since many couples wanted children badly, women were taught to search for indications of conception. Pregnancy was both a social and a personal experience in early modern society and female friends, neighbours, and kin observed and performed tests on each other's bodies, searching for any indication of pregnancy. Such signs were often ambiguous and women could be either deceived into thinking they were pregnant, or failed to realise they were expectant mothers.²⁵ The signs of pregnancy offered by female bodies were uncertain and ambiguous, and women were cautious and vague in the language they used to describe their conditions and experiences.²⁶ Jane Sharp claimed that 'young women especially of their first child, are so ignorant commonly, that they cannot tell whether they have conceived or not and not one of twenty almost keeps a just account'.²⁷ Samuel Pepys recorded that 'my wife, after the absence of her terms for seven weeks, gave me hope of her being with child ... but on

²³ Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, III. iii. 51-66, 82-83, 91-95, pp.41-42.

²⁴ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, p.153.

²⁵ Pollock, 'Embarking on a rough passage', pp.43-45; D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), pp.41-44.

²⁶ C. McClive, 'The Hidden Truths of the Belly: The Uncertainties of Pregnancy in Early Modern Europe', *Social History of Medicine*, 15:2 (2002), pp.209-227.

²⁷ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p.81.

the last day of the year she hath them again', suggesting that they had been monitoring Elizabeth's menstrual cycle closely.²⁸

If conception proved difficult, middling-sort couples could seek advice from medical treatises. Frequent copulation was warned against as it was believed to weaken the seed and result in stunted children. Potential dangers concerning what a woman ate and the maternal imagination were also emphasised.²⁹ Jane Sharp advised couples to 'keep the Organs of procreation pure, and clean, that they may send forth good seed to make the work perfect', explained that 'the good order of the body consists in seasonable moderate eating and drinking of wholesome meats and drinks', and advised women to lead active lives since idleness was 'a great enemy to conception'. 'That may be the reason that so many city dames have so few children, and if they have any they are commonly sickly and short lived' Sharp suggested. 'It is not so with country women who are lusty and strong, for moderate labour raiseth heat, revives the spirits, helps nature in all her faculties, and that is the way to have many and strong children'. However, Sharp advised pregnant women to pursue a virtuous mean with regard to physical activity, as too much work 'wasts and destroys nature'. What a woman wore also affected her chances of conceiving. Sharp warned women not to 'lace themselves too strait for that thrusts down the womb, makes the woman gorbellied, makes her carry her child upon her hips, hinders it from lying as it should in the womb'.³⁰

Fertility advice also circulated orally. When Samuel Pepys attended a gossips' dinner at Anthony Joyce's house, conversation turned to his failure to have children with Elizabeth. The gossips offered copious advice, some of which mirrored that of

²⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, i, p.1.

²⁹ P. Crawford, 'The sucking child: Adult attitudes to child care in the first year of life in seventeenth-century England' in id., *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 2004), pp.144-46.

³⁰ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, pp.71, 137, 181.

Jane Sharp.³¹ Whether Samuel and Elizabeth took the advice is unknown, but if they did it had no effect, and they remained childless. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* Sir Oliver Kix spends money on various fertility remedies, and says he would 'give a thousand pounds to purchase fruitfulness', but such profligacy is of little comfort to Lady Kix. 'Everyone gets before me' she complains, comparing herself enviously to her sister who was 'married but at Barthol'mew-eve last' and 'can have two children at a birth'.³²

As with beauty and clothing, fertility was a point of comparison and a focus of competition for women. In *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* the newly married wife observed the importance of children to her female neighbours. She watched women playing with their children, and preparing linens and clouts, and overheard a woman complain that she was unable to become pregnant. The wife became concerned that although she had been married three months she knew 'nothing at all of these things'. She enquired into the sex lives of the neighbourhood women to ensure her husband understood 'his work', and obtained much advice, consisting of what her husband should eat and drink, and that he should avoid tobacco, 'drying things, or any other things that are too cooling for the kidneys'. For her part she was 'by dallying with him, and some other pretty Wanton postures, try to provoke him to it'. When their advice failed, the young wife resorted to doctors and midwives, who prescribed medicines that made the house 'full of stink and vapours', but all of which proved ineffective.³³

If fertility, like chastity, was part of the bedrock of female respectability, then the number of children that a woman bore in a single birth or during her reproductive years had an additional positive or negative effect on her reputation. Some clerics and

³¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 26 July 1664, v, p.222; cf. Pollock, 'Embarking on a rough passage', pp.41-42.

³² Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, II. i. 137-41, 162-64, p.19.

³³ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, pp.75-83.

advice-book writers praised women with many children. Thomas Hilder believed that numerous offspring were ‘so many several blessings’, and claimed it was not ‘having many children that can undoe thee, but the abuse of so rich a blessing’.³⁴ Elizabeth Clinton claimed that she would pray to God so that ‘all Blessings of heaven and earth’ would fall upon her female readers and their Children ‘as they increase in number’.³⁵ Women were similarly proud of their large families. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* a puritan woman says that children are ‘blessings, if they be got with zeal by the brethren’, and boasts about having five children.³⁶ Women also referred to their fertility when defending themselves against defamations. When Frances Powell called Mrs Ireland a ‘base whore, base queane and base jade’ and a bitch, Ireland responded, ‘no, no bitch, I have been the mother of sixteene children’, whilst another exchange between Elizabeth Jacob and Elizabeth Chare involved one telling the other that she was as good a woman as her rival because she had ten children ‘and thou hast never a one’.³⁷

Yet large families were not universally approved of, and many contemporaries believed that having too many children caused poverty, and were also concerned that the poor gave birth to more children than the rich.³⁸ William Harrison complained of ‘too great store of people in England’, and blamed this on youths ‘marrying too soon’, who instead of profiting the country did ‘fill it full of beggars’.³⁹ Thomas Middleton began *Michaelmas Term* with the declaration that ‘where bags are fruitful’st there the womb’s most barren; the poor has all our children, we their wealth’, and in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* Touchwood Senior tells his wife they must live apart because ‘our desires are both too fruitful for our barren fortunes’, complaining that ‘some only get

³⁴ T. Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell: or Seasonable Advice both to Unmarried and Married Persons* (London, 1653), pp.21-22.

³⁵ E. Clinton, *The Countesse of Lincolns Nurserie* (London, 1622), Sig. A2v, p.1.

³⁶ Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, III. ii. 33-34, p.33.

³⁷ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 137v-138r; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.76-77, 117.

³⁸ Crawford, ‘Construction and experience of maternity’, pp.89-90.

³⁹ W. Harrison, *The Description of England* edited by G. Edelen (Ithaca NY, 1968), p.256.

riches and no children, we can only get children and no riches'.⁴⁰ Jane Sharp claimed that it was 'usual for women to have three at one birth', that women could conceive a second child before the first had been born, and that the quantity and strength of seed, and the position of the stars at the moment of conception determined if a woman would give birth to multiple children. Sharp gave examples of women bearing large numbers of children, including the legendary Countess Margaret of Hennenberge who bore three hundred and sixty five babies having been cursed by a beggar woman after denying her charity.⁴¹ Another version of the tale featured a noblewoman accused of sexual promiscuity by her husband because she was unable to conceive. She was so shocked that her belly began to swell and she went into labour, giving birth to three hundred and sixty five babies 'all like new bred mice'. Her husband did not know what to do, and the wife fell into great sorrow, wishing she had died in childbirth. She prayed for repentance and divine providence intervened when her 'weake and small' children all died.⁴²

However, despite concern about youthful marriages and overpopulation, some clerics promoted early marriage to maximise a woman's reproductive years, and many young women wanted to get married and have children as soon as possible. Thomas Hilder advised parents to have children 'in youthfull daies' when they could best care for them, and so that in return the children would provide 'a staffe or support' to their parents in old age.⁴³ In *The Dorset-Shire Damsel* the heroine complains that had she been married the previous Michaelmas she might by now be a mother.⁴⁴ One jest told of a gentleman who married off one of his younger daughters because she was 'ripest, and more requiring then the rest' of marriage. When her friends asked why she was

⁴⁰ T. Middleton, *Michaelmas Term* (London, 1607) Induction, 23-25 in M. Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World, My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), p.69; Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, II. i. 8-12, p.15

⁴¹ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, pp.57-60, 78.

⁴² Untitled ballad, *Pepys i*, p.45.

⁴³ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, p.45.

⁴⁴ 'The Dorset-shire Damosel: Or, Young Nancy at her last Prayer', *Pepys iii*, p.272.

marrying so soon, she told them that her father had said ‘some Eggs would hatch in an Oven, and that in hot weather things won’t keep without salt.’⁴⁵ Whilst a couple who married and started a family too early risked a life of poverty, there was also a limited timeframe in which to have children. Moreover, as the father was well-aware, it was preferable to marry off a daughter early, rather than risk her having extra-marital sex and giving birth to illegitimate children.

Clearly many women desired children, but such desires were often mixed with anxieties about their chances of surviving childbirth, fears exacerbated by references to maternal vulnerability and child-bed mortality prevalent in clerical writings and the experiences of everyday life. The *Homily of the State of Matrimony* described women ‘relinquish[ing] the liberty of their own rule, in the pain of their travailing, in the bringing up of their children. In which offices they be in great perils, and be grieved with great afflictions which they might be without if they lived out of matrimony.’⁴⁶ Christopher Newstead described a mother as being ‘a good Land-Lord to her childe, giving it both house-roome and nutriment, when it, like an unruly Tenant, doth grieve and vex her’.⁴⁷ One godly ballad asked its audience to consider ‘the pain thy mother had in bringing thee to life’.⁴⁸ Thomas Hilder noted bluntly that ‘sometimes Children cost their mothers their lives in Child-birth’.⁴⁹ Knowledge about the dangers of childbirth was therefore widespread, and many writers emphasised that pregnant women be provided with as much comfort as possible. Barnabe Rich wrote of expectant women experiencing ‘fittes and qualms ... paine [and] sicknes’, and argued that they were to ‘be comforted and cherished ... pitied and commiserated’.⁵⁰ *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* described a pregnant wife as being ‘in so gallant a state

⁴⁵ *Poor Robin’s Jestes: Or, the Compleat Jester* (London, 1666), pp.11-12.

⁴⁶ *A Homily of The State of Matrimony in Sermons or Homilies, to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London, 1817), pp.474-75.

⁴⁷ C. Newstead, *Apology for Women: Or, Women’s Defence* (London, 1620), p.49.

⁴⁸ ‘An Hundred Godly Lessons’, *Pepys ii*, p.17.

⁴⁹ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, p.56.

⁵⁰ B. Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse* (London, 1616), p.57.

and condition' and deemed it her husband's duty to 'cherish and preserve her much' by providing 'Aniseed, Clove, Cinamon-waters, and good sack'.⁵¹

Other balladeers and playwrights were unsympathetic, depicting misogynistic and satirical attitudes to childbirth.⁵² *The Batchelors Feast* ridiculed new fathers who had to 'seeke for gossips and a nurse' and provide money for candles, soap, clouts, swaddling bands, sops and wine.⁵³ *Any thing for a quiet life* told how a newly married wife grew 'wanton sick' within days, and lay in bed until noon, her husband having to care for her by spending money on nurses and a gossips' feast. After being churched the gossips persuaded her to 'take the comforts of the ayre', but her husband remained at home.⁵⁴ In *Eastward Ho* Quicksilver mocks the cunning folk, fools, midwives, nurses, and physicians who might attend a pregnant woman, 'fearing sometimes she is bewitched, sometimes in a consumption', and claims the purpose of such people is to 'tell her tales', 'talk bawdy', 'make her laugh', 'give her clysters', or to let blood from under her tongue and between her toes.⁵⁵ Such depictions were unfair. Seventeenth-century midwives often came from prosperous and influential families, and received training that could extend over many years. Licenses and testimonials were required, and long-term, sometimes close relationships developed between midwives and clients, with satisfied clients recommending their midwives to friends and relations. Numerous midwives travelled across parish boundaries and beyond the city to attend clients from all social levels.⁵⁶ Although not all midwives were reliable or capable, many were qualified, conscientious, and helped to ease the anxieties of expectant mothers.

⁵¹ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures of Marriage*, pp.86-87.

⁵² Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp.174-76.

⁵³ 'The Batchelor's Feast', *Roxburghe* i, p.48.

⁵⁴ 'Any thing for a quiet life', *Pepys* i, p.379; cf. Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, pp.85-115, 143-44, 147-87.

⁵⁵ G. Chapman, B. Jonson and J. Marston, *Eastward Ho* (London, 1605), II. ii. 256-60 in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.90.

⁵⁶ D. Evenden, 'Mothers and their midwives in seventeenth-century London' in H. Marland (ed.), *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe* (London, 1993), pp.9-26.

Nonetheless, despite the availability of competent midwives, female concerns about giving birth remained. Historians need to be wary of taking literary sources at face value, but such materials can provide useful insights into female responses to the difficulties and dangers of childbirth, and depictions of female anxieties often match accounts of elite women concerning fears about childbirth.⁵⁷ In *Bartholomew Fair* Dame Purecraft tells how she loves her daughter Win Littlewit and ‘would not have her miscarry, or hazard her first fruits, if it might be otherwise.’⁵⁸ In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* the gossips acknowledge Mistress Allwit’s good fortune in surviving childbirth, and describe her as ‘a spiny creature’, but ‘well mettled’. ‘She had a sore labour’, notes one, and another explains how ‘we were afraid once, but she made us all have joyful hearts again’. They wish her ‘all health and strength’, and hope she will ‘courageously go forward, to perform the like and many such, like a true sister, with motherly bearing’.⁵⁹ ‘The fear is, either the mother or the child or perhaps both must go to pot’, explained the author of *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage*, arguing that the prescriptions of doctors, ‘nay the very girdle of Saint Francis’ could not guarantee protection.⁶⁰ Some men shared the concerns of women, realised that childbirth could be dangerous, and showed relief at a successful birth. Nehemiah Wallington thanked God for restoring his wife to health when she delivered their child.⁶¹

Anxieties were exacerbated by knowledge of high infant mortality rates in the capital. In 1662 John Graunt estimated that fifty per thousand infants were still born in London. Twenty-five per thousand mothers died in childbirth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with poor diet and heavy manual labour contributing to the

⁵⁷ For examples see Crawford, ‘Construction and experience of maternity’, pp.94-96.

⁵⁸ B. Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* (London, 1631), I. vi. 58-59 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.), *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.512.

⁵⁹ Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, III. ii. 16-22, 74-77, pp.33-34.

⁶⁰ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, p.125.

⁶¹ R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *English Family Life, 1576-1716: An Anthology from Diaries* (Oxford, 1988), p.109.

likelihood of miscarriage.⁶² Nehemiah Wallington heard of 'three score women with child and in childbed that died in one week in Shoreditch parish, and scarce two of a hundred that was sick with child that escaped death'.⁶³ Elizabeth Pepys attended the burial of a child of Samuel's cousin Scott in September 1660 and Pepys recorded that 'this month my aunt Wright was brought to bed of two girles – my Cozen Stradwick of a girl and a boy, and my Cozen Scott of a boy, and all died'. Six years later, whilst he was dining with Sheriff Hooker, Pepys noted that 'all the house [were] melancholy upon the sickness of a daughter of the house on childbed'.⁶⁴ Jane Sharp reported that in London 'one can hardly find as many living as are born in half a years time' and that 'not so many can be found to have lived to seven years of age'.⁶⁵ Although most pregnant women could expect to survive childbirth, they knew there was a significant risk of death for themselves, or the baby, or both.⁶⁶

To help quell these anxieties, pregnant women employed various methods to protect their unborn children and avoid pain or death in childbirth, but the validity of many forms of protection became increasingly problematic during the Reformation. Prior to the Reformation the church had allowed the invocation of the saints as a form of protection, and pregnant mothers vowed to go on pilgrimage if they were delivered safely. Herbals, potions, stones, charms, and even the sacraments were also believed to offer protection. Despite clerical hostility many of these practices continued to be used by Catholics, and were adapted by moderate Protestants from the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For the hotter sort of Protestants and later seventeenth-century non-conformists, prayer to aid and give thanks for the safe delivery of mother and child was vitally important. Other advice offered to pregnant women included avoiding anything that might ignite their passions and all strenuous physical activities,

⁶² Houlbrooke, *English Family*, pp.128-29.

⁶³ Houlbrooke (ed.), *English Family Life*, p.109.

⁶⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 13 September 1660, i, p.244; 13 February 1666, vii, p.41.

⁶⁵ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p.74.

⁶⁶ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, pp.30-31.

moderation in diet, and abstention from sex. However, childbirth anxieties remained palpable for several reasons. Expectant mothers often suffered from melancholy, and the physical effects of pregnancy led it to be considered a time of illness, encouraging beliefs that childbirth was a painful and conspicuous cause of mortality.⁶⁷

Moreover, despite the copious amounts of antenatal advice available, middling sort and plebeian women often found it difficult to follow because of the practical realities of everyday life. Jane Sharp realised that poor women might be unable to afford the remedies she prescribed and naively suggested that 'their rich neighbours' provide them with such necessities. 'I do not question but that all women will be glad to eat and drink well, and to take all things that may do them good if they knew but what, and can procure them', she remarked.⁶⁸ Many pregnant women had to continue working for as long as possible and thus risked involvement in situations that might cause them to miscarry. John Wanley fought Mary Harforde in the street, despite her 'being great with child'.⁶⁹ Whilst walking 'in a public place' in Hounslow Joan Cheese went into labour and fell to the ground, injuring the head of her baby girl, Marie, who died of the injury six days later.⁷⁰ Even pregnant women who remained at home were not necessarily safe. Thomas Laret, an Islington carpenter, came home drunk and assaulted his wife, despite her begging him to stop because in less than five weeks she was due to give birth, and she did not want the child to be harmed.⁷¹ These women were not disregarding the welfare of their unborn children, but attempting to balance their duties as working women and neighbours with those of motherhood.

⁶⁷ M. E. Fissell, 'The Politics of Reproduction in the English Reformation', *Representations*, 87 (Summer 2004), pp.43-81; Pollock, 'Embarking on a rough passage', pp.45-53; Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, pp.21-31, 44-47.

⁶⁸ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, pp.141. Nicholas Culpepper in his *Dictionary for Midwives* (London, 1651) also suggested that the rich ought to provide poor pregnant women with any necessities they required: Fissell, 'Politics of Reproduction', p.72.

⁶⁹ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.321.

⁷⁰ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, p.79.

⁷¹ L. Price, *Bloody Actions Performed* (London, 1653) p.11.

Becoming a mother was therefore one of the most important ways in which married women could earn respect and admiration in early modern society, but it was also fraught with problems, not least because it was difficult for a woman to know if she was truly pregnant, and if she were, whether she and the child would survive the birth. The connections the church made between fertility, piety, and respectability were noted by women themselves, who judged other members of their sex by their ability to reproduce, and the number of children they gave birth to. Having several children was considered a blessing from God, but only if husband and wife had the resources to support such a family. Since the ability of a woman to have children was believed to be affected by her dress, diet, personal hygiene, the amount of physical exercise and labour she performed, and her ability to arouse her husband sexually, a judgement about her fertility entailed suggestions about other aspects of her lifestyle as well. It is thus unsurprising that women sought to emphasise that their husbands had an equal role to play in the business of conception. However, once a child was born, women had different responsibilities to fulfil that they did not always share so intimately with their husbands, and which could have an equally great impact on their reputations.

Raising children: love and discipline

Where the balance lay between affection and discipline in early modern families has caused much debate. Lawrence Stone's assertion that, especially amongst puritans, there was 'a fierce determination to break the will of the child' has been generally rejected.⁷² Although conduct books stressed that children should obey their parents, they emphasised the reciprocity of obligations in parent and child relationships, regarding mutual respect as key, and only advocating physical discipline as a last

⁷² L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Abridged Edition, Harmondsworth, 1979), p.116.

resort. Good parents knew that children needed protection and guidance, and sought to provide for them physically, materially and emotionally, hoping in return for gratitude and obedience. Although parents took pride in the good behaviour and achievements of their children, they also sought, albeit sometimes with difficulty, to instil piety and good behaviour.⁷³ Parental affection and an instinct to protect and nourish children were held to be natural, strong and deeply implanted, but were not to be allowed free rein. Dangers of indulgence were emphasised, and the ideal model of childcare was deemed to be one of moderation, comprising discipline, inculcation of good manners and religious piety, and displays of love and affection.⁷⁴

However, despite the emphasis on obedience to parents promoted by the post-reformation church, 'nobody seems to have taken much notice that the commandment put mothers on a level with fathers.'⁷⁵ Until recently historians have also been gender blind when discussing childrearing.⁷⁶ When the gendered roles of mothers have been considered attention has focussed on criticisms. Mothers were deemed more likely to spoil or 'cocker' their children, and the emergence of professional medical practitioners increased criticism of female childcare.⁷⁷ Some mothers were keen for their sons to mature into adulthood, but due to fathers' concerns that women would effeminise their male offspring, sons of the gentry were very often removed from their mothers' care after the age of six or seven.⁷⁸ Partly as a result of these contemporary anxieties less attention has been paid to the positive aspects of motherhood that were valued by early modern women and men.

Breastfeeding was central to images of good motherhood, but not a duty that all women chose or were able to fulfil. Medical and church authorities argued that a

⁷³ Wrightson, *English Society*, pp.107-18; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp.98-99, 102-03, 113-16, 124-28, 143-56.

⁷⁴ Houlbrooke, *English Family*, pp.134-35, 140-49.

⁷⁵ J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (London, 1985), p.116.

⁷⁶ Crawford, 'Construction and experience of maternity', pp.80-81.

⁷⁷ Crawford, 'The sucking child', pp.159-62.

⁷⁸ Fletcher, *Gender*, pp.86-87, 297-98, 302-03.

mother's milk was best for her child, that a woman was endowed with breasts to feed her children, and that because a child was supposed to develop a natural affection and imbibe the characteristics of the woman who nursed it, mothers who sent children to be wet-nursed risked losing the love of their offspring, or having them absorb undesirable traits. Bishop Jeremy Taylor was an enthusiastic proponent of women emulating the Virgin Mary and breastfeeding their own infants, eulogising about women's breasts as 'exuberent fontinels'. Yet elite women frequently employed wet-nurses for various reasons. Some were sick or exhausted after childbirth, or suffered from congenital defects that prevented them breastfeeding. Others found the process painful, inconvenient, or detrimental to their appearance. Some husbands discouraged their wives from breastfeeding, perhaps because sexual intercourse during the period of breastfeeding was frowned upon. Amongst urban middling sorts infants were mostly breastfed at home by the mothers, with only a tiny minority wet-nursed. Women who used nurses chose them carefully, based often on recommendations by friends and family. Parents became angry if the nurse mistreated their child, and either visited them regularly or received updates of their progress. Advice on what to look for in wet-nurses circulated in medical texts, and some nurses were treated with gratitude and affection.⁷⁹

Elizabeth Clinton insisted that breastfeeding was the 'loving act of a loving mother' and told her female readers that it was a means 'wherein you have gone before the greatest number of honourable Ladies of your place, in these latter times.'⁸⁰ Dorothy Leigh wrote that a good mother ought to bless her child 'euery time it suckes on her brests, when she feeleth the blood come from her heart to nourish it'.⁸¹ One of

⁷⁹ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp.269-71; Wrightson, *English Society*, p.108; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp.212-18; Houlbrooke, *English Family*, pp.132-34. For Bishop Taylor see D. MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London, 2003), p.653.

⁸⁰ Clinton, *Countesse of Lincolns Nurserie*, Sig. A2r.

⁸¹ D. Leigh, 'The Mothers Blessing' (London, 1616) in S. Brown (ed.), *Women's Writing in Stuart England* (Stroud, 1999), p.23.

the most balanced and detailed discussions of wet-nursing and breastfeeding was that of Jane Sharp, who listed reasons why women might be unable to breastfeed, including tightly-laced clothes, 'little blood', 'much watching, and fasting, and labour, and sweating, and great evacuations by stool or Urine, strong passions, or great pains, sorrows, cares, or strong Feavers'. Sharp advised women to drink milk with fennel seed, 'feed on good nourishment, and drink good drink'. Women's bodies had to be 'hot and moist, or not very dry' and 'of easy digestion' for them to 'breed good blood, that the milk that is bred may have no strong qualities with it to offend the infant'. Sharp cautioned against wet-nursing as 'it changeth the natural disposition of the child, and oftentimes exposeth the infant to many hazards, if great care be not taken in the choice of the nurse', but she did not disregard it utterly, and advised employing a nurse if the mother's milk had 'any ill qualities'. Some women were 'full of blood, lusty, and strong, and so well tempered to increase milk, that they can suckle a child of their own and another for a friend', and Sharp believed that it would 'not be amiss for them when they have too great plenty to do so, if they be poor, for it will help them with food, and not hurt their own child'. The nurse was to be 'of a sanguine complexion', her milk good 'and her breasts and nipples handsome, and well-proportioned'. She was to be moderately tall, 'well flesht', with a 'ruddy, merry, cheerful, delightsome countenance', clear skin, and hair 'a mean between black, and white and red ... a light brown, that partakes somewhat of all'. Such a woman was to be sociable and jovial, able to sing, dance, enjoy being with children, and ideally to be aged somewhere in her twenties. 'A Nurse is best after her second child' explained Sharp. 'Her milk must not be above ten months old when you chuse her; nor under two months old, for that will be too new'. The nurse had to be able 'to live well' and be reasonably well-educated, 'for if she be not well bred, she will never breed the children well'. She was to 'live in a well-tempered pure, Air', to 'sleep well when she

is sleepy, that she may soon wake if the child cry' and to 'use good Diet and Exercise, [for] it will breed good blood, and good blood makes good milk'. Sharp also advised on how long a child should be breastfed, suggesting that 'a year old is sufficient for most children'. 'When children suck so overlong, as three or four years, I seldome hear of any of them that ever come to good' she explained. 'Their children by overcockering, growing so stubborn and unnatural, that they have proved a great grief to their parents'.⁸²

Many women would have agreed with Sharp that there were occasions when wet-nursing was a sensible option. A month after giving birth to a son the wife of Nehemiah Wallington developed sore breasts and the child was unable to feed for three days, resulting in him being put out to wet-nurse in the country.⁸³ One woman who sold fruit in Cheapside 'neer Soper-lane end under the signe of the Golden-key', carried her baby out of London because wet-nursing was cheaper outside the capital.⁸⁴ She may also have believed that the child would be better protected from the disease and instability of everyday life in the metropolis. *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* contained a lengthy discussion of the difficulties and dangers of wet-nursing for mother and child. The child might refuse to feed from the nurse, and if the mother's breasts grew hard with lumps because the milk was not being sucked, remedies might have to be employed to draw out the milk. Wet-nursing was 'very damageable, and cruel chargeable' one character observed, accusing wet-nurses of being 'generally very lazy and liquorish ... ever chatting and chawing something or other with the Maids'. However, despite such warnings and after much effort 'a very neat, cleanly, and mighty modest woman' was found to nurse the newborn infant. The author explained that couples who employed wet-nurses had a 'greater advantage in

⁸² Sharp, *Midwives Book*, pp. 250, 258-71.

⁸³ Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p.213.

⁸⁴ *The Unnatural Grand Mother* (London, 1659), p.6.

participating of the pleasures of marriage' and might enjoy 'venial pleasures' that could result in another child.⁸⁵

Clerics such as Thomas Gataker advocated that mothers should be responsible for 'the diligent and carefull education' of their children.⁸⁶ Many writers emphasised the importance of early childhood education, which they considered to be primarily a maternal duty. Robert Cleaver believed that 'a child wisely trained up by the mother in the young yeares, will bee the easier brought to goodnesse', and that mothers ought to 'poure good licour in to their tiny vessels, the favour whereof, shall sticke in them a long while after'.⁸⁷ Matthew Griffith told mothers to provide good examples for their children to emulate, warning them to 'be sure your carriage before them be just, and justifiable lest instead of being their correctors, you prove their corruptors'.⁸⁸ William Gouge offered a more complex assessment of maternal responsibilities. 'The honour of well nurturing children redoundeth especially to the mother', he explained. 'While children are young, their mother is most in their sight ... she feedeth, she apparelleth them, she tendeth them when they are not well'.⁸⁹ Christopher Newstead described 'educing, education, and affection' as 'the threefold cords that should tye each childe to the loue of its mother'.⁹⁰

How a woman treated her child affected her relationship with her husband and society in general. According to Daniel Rogers, a mother was to train and instruct the children until they were old enough for the father to take responsibility and was also to support the father in reproofing and correcting his disobedient offspring. The care a woman displayed for her husband's children was supposed to reflect her love for him. 'She nourishes, solaces herself in, beholds him in them, visits clothes and releeves

⁸⁵ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, pp.133-35, 140-42, 197.

⁸⁶ T. Gataker, *Marriage Duties briefly couched together* (London, 1620), p.20.

⁸⁷ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, pp.60-61.

⁸⁸ Griffith, *Bethel*, p.132.

⁸⁹ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p.546.

⁹⁰ Newstead, *Apology for Women*, p.48. The OED defines educe as 'to evoke, give rise to (actions, manifestations, etc). Presumably Newstead meant this to relate to piety and faith.

them in their needs', explained Rogers.⁹¹ Edward Reynolds claimed that by educating their children and governing their family, pious women might 'yield a sweet favour to those about them'.⁹² Women held strong ideas on how their children should be raised, particularly teaching them about religion and modesty. Katherine Stubbes prayed that her husband Philip would educate their son 'in good letters, in teaching & discipline' and bring him up in a religious manner.⁹³ Katherine Bettergh asked her husband to bring up their child 'among the children of God, and in the true feare and knowledge of his Majestie'.⁹⁴ Elizabeth Richardson wrote to her daughters to tell them her main concern was 'for the new birth of your soules; to bring you to eternall life' and hoped they would absorb her attempts to instil virtue and piety in them.⁹⁵ Margaret Bewley taught her son the Scriptures from an early age and 'was in pain till she saw Christ formed in him'. Margaret prayed daily for him, offered 'wholesome counsel and wise reproofs', and was 'ambitious to have him eminent and useful in that employment which he intended'. Four months before he died Margaret wrote that she was pleased with his physical welfare 'and that thy outward man prospers', but that she was concerned about 'the flourishing of thy inward man, and the prosperity of thy soul, thy thriving in grace'.⁹⁶ Matthew Fowler described Ann Smith, the wife of a London citizen, as 'in meekness with her prudent mother train'd' and 'her self a Mother still that grace retain'd'.⁹⁷

Not all female authors emphasised piety. Susanna Jesserson described a good mother being 'very tender of her Children, and thinks them her choicest treasure, yet

⁹¹ D. Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour: Or, The Mutuall Crowne and Comfort of Godly, Loyall and Chaste Marriage* (London, 1642), pp.299, 323.

⁹² E. Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution for Christian Women* (London, 1659), p.2.

⁹³ P. Stubbes, *A Christall Glasse for Christian Women* (London, 1612), p.8.

⁹⁴ *The Christian Life and Death of Mistris Katherin Bettergh* (London, 1612), Sig. B3v-B4r.

⁹⁵ E. Richardson, 'A Ladies Legacie to her Daughters' (London, 1645) in S. Brown (ed.), *Women's Writing in Stuart England* (Stroud, 1999), p.164.

⁹⁶ Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution*, pp.4-5.

⁹⁷ M. Fowler, *Gods Esteem of the Death of his Saints* (London, 1656), p.27.

gives them no occasion to curse her hereafter for over-fond Indulgence'.⁹⁸ Jesserson was exceptional in not being focussed on inculcating piety, but many mothers showed a concern for various aspects of the development of their children. Elizabeth Joscelyn wrote a maternal legacy to ensure the religious education of her child and to prevent it being exposed to bad language, telling her husband 'thou shalt find it a hard matter to break a child of that it learns so younge' because 'it will bee a great while ear it will be thought ould enough to bee beaten for euill words and by that time it will be so [im]perfect that blows will not mend it'. Elizabeth did not want her child to receive special treatment because it had lost its mother, and offered advice on its education, suggesting different options depending on its sex. If a boy it was to be sent to school and be trained to enter the ministry, and if a girl she hoped her mother Brooke would teach her 'huswifery, writing and good work'. 'Other learninge a woman needs not', she wrote. 'Though I admire it in those who whom God hathe blest w[ith] discretion yet I desire it not much in my own'. Elizabeth left it to the discretion of her husband as to whether he wanted 'a learned daughter', but prayed that he would teach her modesty and humility. More generally she hoped her child would be taught respect for others and that her husband would 'be not profuse in the expence of clothes for it me thinks it is a vain delight in parents to bestow that cost vppon one childe w[hich] would serue too or three.' If she survived childbirth Elizabeth vowed that her legacy would be a 'lookinge glasse whearin to see when I am too seuear when too remiss and in my childes fault thorough this glasse discern my own error'.⁹⁹

Dorothy Leigh believed it impossible for a mother not to love a child she had carried 'so neere her heart' and borne 'with so much bitter pain', but that being a good mother involved combining affection, discipline, and religious education. 'Will she

⁹⁸ S. Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors. Or: The Best Wife In the World for a Penny* (London, 1675), p.6.

⁹⁹ Joscelyn, 'Legacy' in Brown (ed.), *Women's Writing*, pp.106-09.

not labour now till Christ be formed in it?' she asked, 'will she not instruct it in the youth, and admonish it in the age, and pray for it continually?' However, Dorothy also believed a mother would 'venture to offend the world for her childrens sake', and that maternal love was 'hardly contained within the bounds of reason'. She advocated teaching children to read between the ages of four and ten, when 'they are not able to do any good in the Commonwealth', and desired children to be brought up 'with much gentlenesse and patience' as 'gentlenes will soonest bring them to vertue'.¹⁰⁰

A few individual women placed their spiritual lives above maternal affection and motherly duties. Margaret Ducke claimed shortly before she died that 'she would willingly leave Husband, and Children, and all to come to Christ' because 'she was assured God would provide for them'. Seven of her children had died in infancy, and Margaret's only comfort was that they would be waiting for her in heaven. A week before she died she called for her eldest daughter who was about to go to school in Putney, put her hand on the girl's shoulder and blessed her, bidding her 'serve God, and pray duly morning and evening to God, and fear his Name'. That evening she blessed her younger daughter in identical fashion.¹⁰¹

Many mothers' legacies requested rather than ordered widowed husbands to carry out the last wishes of their authors, perhaps reflecting how domestic decisions were made whilst the women were alive. Other couples divided the responsibilities of childcare more equally and brought their children up in peace and quiet. Anthony and Elizabeth James had a daughter and son and 'in the education and bringing up of these two Children, there was a pretty loving contention betweene the Goodman and the Wife, which of the two should prove most happie to the Parents delight, whose love

¹⁰⁰ Leigh, *Mothers Blessing* in Brown (ed.), *Women's Writing*, pp.23, 30-31.

¹⁰¹ W. Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon preached by Dr Gouge of Black-Friers London, in Cheswicke Church, August 24. 1646. At the funeralls of Mrs Margaret Ducke wife of Dr Ducke, one of the Masters of requests to his Majesty* (London, 1646), pp.36-38.

indeede was alike to them both'.¹⁰² Such spousal cooperation was not universal, and many couples argued about how to raise their children.¹⁰³ In one extreme case Jonathan and Elizabeth Bridgeman were involved in such a heated argument that Jonathan picked up a gouge, pulled off the handle, and stabbed his wife with it, causing her to die of the wound a couple of weeks later.¹⁰⁴ Another dispute about children began when a journeyman cooper returned from the alehouse to be told by his wife that one of their children was ill. When she requested money to buy medicine from the apothecary's he fell into a rage, attacked her, and inflicted several mortal wounds.¹⁰⁵ *The Confession of the New Married Couple* depicted the different responses of father and mother to discovering that their son wished to study at Oxford or Cambridge. The father agreed to the plan, but the mother disapproved, desiring her son to be brought up to inherit his father's shop, and citing the cost and distractions of university life to support her argument.¹⁰⁶

The fact that wives often clashed with husbands about how their children were being raised suggests that most mothers wanted to do the best for their children, especially when they were maltreated. Samuel Pepys was witness to 'the natural affection of a poor woman' at the *King's House* theatre. When the child was brought on stage and began crying the woman 'by force got upon the stage, and took up her child and carried it away'.¹⁰⁷ However, examples of maternal affection are difficult to locate other than in diaries and autobiographies. More frequently recorded are cases of child abuse that offer different insights into maternal attitudes. One case at the Old Bailey centred on an eight-year old girl sent to the house of her mother's master for

¹⁰² *Most Cruel and Bloody Murther committed by an Inkeepers Wife, called Annis Dell, and her Sonne George Dell, Foure yeeres since* (London, 1606), Sig. A3r.

¹⁰³ For examples see Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p.152.

¹⁰⁴ OBP, 20 May 1686, t16860520-12.

¹⁰⁵ *Bloody News from Clerkenwell* (London, n.d.) pp.5-6.

¹⁰⁶ A. Marsh, *The Confession of the New Married Couple, Being the Second Part of the Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (London, 1683), p.153. Ultimately the son goes to study theology at Oxford, p.157.

¹⁰⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 28 December 1667, viii, p.594.

sixpence. The master was absent, and his apprentice invited the girl in, promising to give her the money, but instead exploiting the opportunity to rape her. Fearing her mother would be angry the girl said nothing, and was only questioned on the following Wednesday when her mother noticed that her daughter was exhibiting some unusual symptoms.¹⁰⁸ When William Harding enticed Sarah Southby, aged ‘about 7 or 8 years ... into a dark Cellar by the allurements of Apples’ and raped her Sarah contracted ‘the foul Disease’, and William ‘so abused her secret parts’ that she was in ‘a most miserable condition’. Sarah did not complain initially ‘lest her mother should beat her’ and only reported the incident when ‘her extream torment enforced her to it’.¹⁰⁹ Such cases were not untypical, and well into the eighteenth century vulnerable young girls were often sent on errands that placed them in potentially dangerous all-male environments.¹¹⁰

On initial inspection it is difficult to ascertain what such horrific incidents can tell us about good mothering. They suggest that some mothers were irresponsible and allowed their children to wander the streets unsupervised, whilst it would also appear that their children regarded them with trepidation, and feared to approach them for support and comfort even after instances of abuse. Some parents did not discover injuries inflicted on their daughters for some time, and once revealed some girls were treated harshly, accused of allowing themselves to be made whores and beaten for the shame they had brought on themselves and their families.¹¹¹ In a small minority of cases some truly unfortunate girls were even sold into prostitution by one or both

¹⁰⁸ OBP, 3 July 1678, t16780703-3.

¹⁰⁹ OBP, 21 April 1680, t16800421-5.

¹¹⁰ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.236-39; J. Gammon, “A denial of innocence”: female juvenile victims of rape and the English legal system in the eighteenth century’ in A. Fletcher and S. Hussey (eds.), *Childhood in question: Children, parents and the state* (Manchester and New York, 1999) p.77.

¹¹¹ M. Ingram, ‘Child sexual abuse in early modern England’ in M. Braddick and J. Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: order, hierarchy and subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.70-72.

parents.¹¹² Samuel Pepys recorded Elizabeth telling how ‘Mis Tooker hath got a clap, as young as she is; being brought up loosely by her mother – having been in bed with her mother when her mother hath had a man come into bed and lay with her’.¹¹³ In *The Alchemist* Epicure Mammon claims that ‘fathers and mothers’ are the best bawds and in *A Mad World My Masters* the courtesan’s mother acts as her bawd, deceiving men into buying her daughter’s maidenhead fifteen times to make a dowry for the courtesan’s marriage.¹¹⁴

However, it would be a grotesque mistake to treat the outrageous stories of the Jacobean stage as social realism, or to take a solitary piece of Restoration gossip as representative of general practices. The rape cases are also problematic; they do not tell us how far children were from their mothers when the rapes occurred, and once the mothers discovered what had happened they used the law to find and punish the offenders. Such cases suggest that after the age of about seven daughters were expected to be useful to their mothers, for example by running brief errands in the neighbourhood. Although this clearly placed them at risk, such behaviour should not be used to demonstrate a lack of maternal affection. These women were not molly-codling mothers, but mothers who wanted their daughters to have a freedom of movement in the London streets that patriarchy sometimes sought to deny them. They were not uncaring, and if their daughters needed help it was readily available, but they were also authority figures, capable of punishing as well as protecting their children.

Cheap print offers another access point to mother-child relationships. Tessa Watt noted that ballad discourse frequently associated the role of the mother with

¹¹² P. Griffiths, ‘The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London’, *Continuity and Change* (1993), p.45.

¹¹³ Pepys, *Diary*, 24 February 1667, viii, p.79.

¹¹⁴ B. Jonson, *The Alchemist* (London, 1616), II. ii. 57-58 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.), *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.385; T. Middleton, *A Mad World my Masters* (London, 16??), I. i. 145-46 in M. Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World, My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), p.6.

teaching and conveying proverbial wisdom.¹¹⁵ However, ballads and jest-books also emphasised a need for maternal discipline. *An Hundred Godly Lessons* warned that if children were allowed to have their will they might shame their mothers.¹¹⁶ *A Looking-Glass for a Christian Family* depicted a daughter cursing her caring mother. The mother advised other mothers not to spare the rod and spoil the child, but instead to 'apply the Twigs before they stubborn stand, / lest at last you can't bend them with your hand'.¹¹⁷ How much freedom adolescent girls and young women were allowed to socialise with the opposite sex created arguments between mothers and daughters. Sometimes mothers issued threats to control their daughters. One ballad depicted a mother threatening to take away her daughter's silk gowns and topknots, and send her to work in the fields clothed in sacking.¹¹⁸ However, not all daughters were easily subdued. Jests depicted daughters answering their mothers back when they were reprimanded 'for gadding up and down among alehouses', and mothers despairing that even if they were to attempt to lock their daughters in the house they would find some means of escaping.¹¹⁹ Yet, as with court cases, cheap print reveals that if daughters were in trouble most mothers sought to support them as best they could. *The Innocent Maid Deceiv'd* depicted the furious reaction of a mother to discovering her unmarried daughter was pregnant, but after calming down she advised her daughter to father the child on Ned, her previous sweetheart, before her pregnancy became noticeable.¹²⁰

Being a good mother therefore involved disciplining children in order to instil morals and godliness that women hoped would ensure good behaviour, but it was also expected that mothers would support and aid their children if they strayed from such a

¹¹⁵ T. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1560-1640* (Cambridge, 1991), p.101.

¹¹⁶ 'An Hundred Godly Lessons', *Pepys i*, p.17.

¹¹⁷ 'A Looking-Glass for a Christian Family', *Pepys ii*, p.34.

¹¹⁸ 'The Maulsters Daughter of Malborough', *Pepys iii*, p.70.

¹¹⁹ *Poor Robin's Jests*, pp.73, 146.

¹²⁰ 'The Innocent Maid Deceiv'd by a Dissembling Batchelor: Or, The Mothers Advice to her Wanton Daughter', *Pepys iii*, p.82.

righteous path. A murder pamphlet claimed that 'mothers have harts of wax that melt and consume in the heate of sorrow, that comes by the wrong of their children: and eyes (that like full fountains) in aboundance of teares, show the greefe and anguish they suffer for the least wrong their children suffer'.¹²¹ Depositions provide evidence of women displaying maternal concern for the welfare of their children and defending or protecting them from outside threats. One irate wife defamed Margaret Ellis, claiming Ellis was her husband's whore and that her husband had pawned her children's clothes and wasted his money on Ellis. Frances Rayden and Mary Crookes fell out when Mary's son struck Frances' daughter as the children played together in St John's Street, Clerkenwell. Francis came out into the street and accused Mary's husband of being a 'rascalle' and 'copper nosed roague'. 'Cannot my honest children goe in quiet for yor bastards' Frances demanded, before defaming Mary as a 'drunken queene' and claiming that she had given birth to illegitimate children 'in the hospitall'.¹²² The behaviour of their offspring might also bring women into conflict with each other. When Joane Jervis's son was playing with a cat and dog in the street her neighbour, a woman named Fossett, threatened to burn the cat if the boy did not play further from her door. Joane replied that 'she had better let the boy's cat alone', and the two women fell into 'railing and disgracefull words'.¹²³ Priscilla Hayton and Ellen Stone were at variance because Hayton's children were plotting to beat Stone's child.¹²⁴ Such evidence supports the assertion that 'maternal authority could be used beyond the household to justify intervention in the wider world'.¹²⁵

Good motherhood involved providing for one's children as well as defending them, but for many mothers in London as elsewhere this proved a major struggle

¹²¹ T. B., *The Bloudy Mother, or The most inhumane murthers, committed by Iane Hattersley vpon diuers infants, the issue of her owne bodie & the priuate burying of them in an orchard with her araignment and execution* (London, 1610), Sig. Br.

¹²² GL MS 9057/1, fos. 11-14, 86.

¹²³ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 190v.

¹²⁴ LMA DL/C/235, fo. 311r.

¹²⁵ Crawford, 'Construction and experience of maternity', p.102.

because their husbands had died or deserted them. Numerous women kept their families functioning as best they could, but they often had to turn to the parish for aid. In a period of increasing social polarisation and godly reform, women were assessed individually to determine if they were worthy recipients of relief. The women discussed below all received relief to some degree, suggesting that the London vestrymen deemed them to conform to a significant degree to impoverished yet respectable ideals of motherhood. Elizabeth Essex complained to the masters of St Bride's parish when the father of her child, Robert Finch, slighted her 'neere her time of deliverance', whereupon he was made to carry her into the country, where she gave birth. On returning to London, Elizabeth hoped Finch would provide for her, 'but findinge none she complained againe to the masters of the parish of St Brides'.¹²⁶ Although we do not know how successful her appeal was, evidently Elizabeth believed that the parish was the first resort for a pregnant woman in need. Relief was given as accommodation and money. Agnes Hewes received a small sum of money and the use of an empty chamber in the churchyard of St Michael Cornhill because she and her 'many poor children' had been deserted by her 'lewd husband'.¹²⁷ Her self-fashioning as the victim of an inadequate 'lewd husband' made Agnes an ideal recipient of parish charity. By contrast widowed mothers did not need to provide such narratives to secure relief. Although the vestry of St Margaret New Fish Street ordered that 'some convenient place or house' be found for Widow Edwards and her children, no explanation of her necessity for relief was recorded.¹²⁸ Widow Mary Randell received two shillings sixpence from the vestry of St Benet Paul's wharf to relieve herself and her children. Goody Prescott, her mother, was still alive, but

¹²⁶ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 112.

¹²⁷ C. Schen, 'Strategies of poor aged women and widows in sixteenth-century London' in P. Thane and L. Botelho (eds.), *Women and Ageing in Britain since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), p.24.

¹²⁸ GL MS 1175/1, fo. 108v.

presumably unable to provide help, though the fact that she was mentioned indicates that family and kin might offer an alternative port of call for the poor.¹²⁹

Women did not have to be helpless victims to obtain parish relief. In fact, the ability and willingness to work increased the likelihood of a single mother obtaining benefits. St Botolph's Billingsgate granted Margot Culd three pounds 'toward ye mananging of her trade of buttchirye to releve her selfe and 3 children her husband being gone from her'.¹³⁰ St Benet Paul's Wharf gave twenty shillings to the widow Goody Dardye and her four children whilst her boat and sculls were being repaired. Dardye was probably a waterman's widow, and the vestry apparantly did not consider her likely to become a long-term burden on the parish. Four months later, however, she received another five shillings, suggesting her situation had not yet improved.¹³¹

When parish resources proved insufficient for relieving single mothers other bodies had to be approached. When the parishioners of St Alphage London Wall wrote to the governors of Christ's Hospital to explain that the widowed Sara Kensey 'hath on her hande ii small children & through the great necessitie & povertie that she is in, is not able to relyve and manteyne them', they requested that Elizabeth, her four-year-old daughter, 'be educated and brought up amongst the other poor children' until the age of sixteen when the parish would accept responsibility again for her if no one else could.¹³² The letter suggests a process of negotiation between the vestry and the hospital. Sara's poverty and widowhood made her an ideal recipient of relief, and the offer to take back responsibility for the young girl at some later stage was designed to obtain the goodwill of the governors.

Not all women sought to, or were able to obtain relief through official channels, and many resorted to other less acceptable methods to survive. Margery

¹²⁹ GL MS 877/1, fo. 167.

¹³⁰ GL MS 943/1, fo. 57v.

¹³¹ GL MS 877/1, fos. 164, 167.

¹³² GL MS 1431/1, fo. 3.

Yoel, a servant in Blackfriars, stole a silver porringer and two silver spoons, and when caught pleaded poverty, explaining 'that her husband lay in prison', and that she had committed the crime to relieve the needs of her three small children'.¹³³ Some desperate mothers abandoned their children, with up to a thousand foundlings a year being left on the metropolitan streets by the later seventeenth century. Most left their infants in places where they would be quickly discovered and infants under four weeks old were rarely abandoned. Many mothers left details pinned to the infants' clothing explaining the reasons for abandonment, mostly because of illegitimacy, widowhood or desertion by the father. Deciding to abandon a child was not an easy decision. Some mothers later sought to reclaim their children, suggesting that only extreme poverty had led them to abandon their child.¹³⁴ Abandonment might be the last resort of desperate women seeking to do what little they could for their children.

Whilst women were generally desperate to keep their children with them, the London authorities did much to ensure that children remained the responsibility of their mothers. After the Bridewell governors took in Robert Lucas 'a poor boy that hath the falling sicknes' they ordered that he be delivered unpunished to his mother, who promised to keep him off the streets.¹³⁵ Similarly, Elizabeth Peers, brought in for disobedience, Thomas Foord, a vagrant beggar, and Rebecca Romford, taken in a 'suspicious house' were all discharged into the care of their respective mothers.¹³⁶ In none of these cases was any husband or father mentioned. The question of who was best suited to care for children had no definitive answer. Whilst parishes had legal authorisation to remove vagrant children aged four or above from their mothers, many paid mothers to nurse their own children instead of taking them into care.¹³⁷ The

¹³³ OBP, 12 December 1683, t16831212-27.

¹³⁴ V. Fildes, 'Maternal feelings re-assessed: child abandonment and neglect in London and Westminster, 1550-1800' in id. (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 1990), pp.139-78.

¹³⁵ GL MS 33011/5, fo. 2.

¹³⁶ GL MS 33011/9, fos. 67, 153, 162.

¹³⁷ Crawford, 'Construction and experience of maternity', p.87.

evidence presented here suggests that older children, some of whom may have been adolescents or young adults, were returned to their biological mothers even if the option of incarceration or institutional care was available, and even when the women lacked male support. Maternal discipline and care, albeit often made difficult by either poverty or the lack of a father figure, was evidently frequently deemed superior to institutionalisation.

This is not to suggest that mothering was only the duty of biological mothers. Whilst older children might be sent to school, very young infants were cared for by wet-nurses, childminders, landladies or elder siblings.¹³⁸ Churchwardens paid householders to keep orphaned or unwanted children, and eight householders received such payments in Southwark in 1622.¹³⁹ When the widow Margaret Smith died in October 1652 her twelve-year-old daughter was taken in and cared for by Mary Rose, who received five pounds from St Botolph Bishopsgate parish and the goods widow Smith had left her daughter.¹⁴⁰ William Eyles and his wife agreed to keep Elizabeth Pecke and provide her with 'sufficyent meate drinke and apparell' so she would not be a burden on the parish.¹⁴¹ Parishes were not always so generous. Mistress Lambert was living in an almshouse on St Peter's Hill when she came to the vestry of St Benet Paul's Wharf to seek relief to care for her orphaned grandson. She was refused because she would not reveal the whereabouts of ten pounds the boy's mother had bequeathed for his care.¹⁴²

Of greater interest is the story of Emma Otslie who described how one afternoon near Shrovetide in 1566 she was standing at her door in Hosier Lane holding a child in her arms 'and for that the child wold not be still she went from her

¹³⁸ Earle, *City Full of People*, p.115.

¹³⁹ J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), p.84.

¹⁴⁰ GL MS 943/1, fo. 73v.

¹⁴¹ GL MS 1175/1, fo. 11v.

¹⁴² GL MS 877/1, fo. 186.

owne doore up ye lane to the intent to still ye child'.¹⁴³ Her deposition is interesting because of its vagueness; we are told neither the gender nor parentage of the child, although apparently Emma was not the mother and there is nothing to suggest she was a servant; she may have been a neighbour or perhaps kin temporarily minding the child as a favour. The failure of the child to settle prompted Emma to leave her doorstep and venture along the street, leading her to witness a defamatory insult that brought her to the consistory court as a deponent. Similarly Maria Jennett described how she was 'looking to the children' when she heard her mistress defamed in Chitterling Alley in Allhallows parish in Barking.¹⁴⁴ When Anne Holland and her husband John were in an alehouse in St Clement Danes, they invited Thomas Coxon to drink with them as he lived nearby. After Thomas arrived and began drinking, Ann left to look after her child and returned to the alehouse an hour later, during which time she was seen 'to go up Coxons Stairs, and return with some things in her Lap'.¹⁴⁵ Ann and John were acquitted but the incident is interesting. Ann used her maternal responsibilities as an excuse for to leave the company in the alehouse confirming that both women and men generally perceived childcare as a primarily female concern; but the fact that she and her husband were drinking there together suggests she had found someone else – and older child or neighbour perhaps – to look after the child left at home. Maternal desire to display their children to friends and neighbours could also give women a legitimate reason to leave the house.¹⁴⁶ Motherhood enabled women to consolidate their positions in neighbourhood communities, and provided them with excuses to venture outside the household and strengthening bonds with neighbours who might provide temporary child-care.

¹⁴³ GL MS 9056, fos. 4v-5r.

¹⁴⁴ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 179v-180r.

¹⁴⁵ OBP, 6 April 1687, t16870406-35.

¹⁴⁶ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, pp.199-201.

At the most basic level motherhood involved providing children with food and clothes, and caring for them when they were sick. Mothers were expected to breastfeed, but many women recognised that this was not always a practical option, and advice circulated on choosing a good wet-nurse, suggesting that mothers who did not breastfeed were by no means unconcerned with the welfare of their babies. Education was also important, but most problematic was balancing love and discipline. Although mothers were often criticised for their alleged softness, maternal love was praised by all. Many mothers sent fairly young children on errands occasionally with unfortunate consequences, but such actions reveal that mothers wanted their children to enjoy a degree of independence from an early age. Mothers were not afraid to discipline their children, and often did so especially with forward daughters.

If their children got into trouble, mothers were quick to spring to their defence, even if this brought them into conflict with neighbours. But motherhood also enabled women to interact with female neighbours in more reputable ways. Women shared childcare responsibilities, and were enthusiastic to display their children to female neighbours, encouraging a sense of belonging in their communities. Many single mothers worked hard to keep their families together, and both the parishes and hospitals to whom desperate women turned for assistance attempted to keep mothers and children together if at all possible. Ultimately children did leave home to go into service or apprenticeship, but even at this stage of their lifecycle mothers sought to maintain regular contact with their offspring, for both emotional and practical reasons.

After childhood: concern and interference

Histories of the family and parenting have focussed primarily on issues of conception and child-rearing until adolescence. However, maternal duties continued throughout

the lives of both mothers and children. Parents helped children secure apprenticeships or posts in service, and remained in contact after they left home, assisting them when problems arose. Children were not deemed to be fully adult until they completed an apprenticeship, a period in service, or some form of professional education to enable them to accumulate the resources to marry and establish a household. Daughters, and occasionally sons, might care for distressed parents, but the turbulent nature of many parent-child relationships, as well as poverty, meant this was not always the case.¹⁴⁷ To what extent adult children wanted their parents to be involved in their lives also varied, of course, and some perceived parental concern as undue interference, particularly regarding decisions about careers and marriage.¹⁴⁸

Several historians have touched on the issue of relationships between children and parents after the latter left the family household. Anne Laurence has described the family as 'a network of obligations' reaching beyond the household, and explains the process of sending children into apprenticeship and service as a way of extending the number of connections.¹⁴⁹ Paul Griffiths argued that entering service did not lead automatically to a complete break from one's parents as contact was often maintained, suggesting instead that young people 'left home' on numerous occasions and returned after their term in service expired.¹⁵⁰ Diana O'Hara noted that many young adults sought the goodwill of their parents before deciding to marry, and that some fathers and mothers ordered the distribution of their property through bequests so that their offspring were compelled to comply with their wishes regarding such matters.¹⁵¹ Bernard Capp has shown how adult daughters and elderly mothers might seek refuge

¹⁴⁷ For different opinions on the extent of early modern familial obligations see Wrightson, *English Society*, pp.113-14; Houlbrooke, *English Family*, pp.166-78, 182-85, 187-192; Macfarlane, *Love and Marriage*, pp.79-116; P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: past experiences, present issues* (Oxford, 2000), pp.119-46.

¹⁴⁸ Laurence, *Women in England*, pp.86-88.

¹⁴⁹ Laurence, *Women in England*, p.91.

¹⁵⁰ Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, pp.7-8.

¹⁵¹ D. O'Hara, *Courtship and constraint: Rethinking the making of marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000), pp.31-32, 165-80, 194-213.

with each other from difficult marriages.¹⁵² More specifically Ilana Ben-Amos has asserted that unequal reciprocity, negotiated and induced through exchanges of various material and emotional goods, was a marked feature of parent-child relationships across the life course, and that parents invested far more in their offspring than they received in return.¹⁵³ Similarly Elizabeth Foyster has described marriage as 'a false dividing line to impose on our understanding of childhood, adulthood and parenting' since neither the dependency of childhood nor supervision of children by parents ended when the former left home. Foyster argues that parents might be involved in the marriages of their children for numerous reasons. Some parents helped stabilise unions and aided daughters in difficult marriages, while others sowed discord and gave evidence against the spouses of their offspring in separation cases. Moreover, Foyster notes that very often we know little about when and how parents became involved in the marriages of their children.¹⁵⁴

The work of Ben-Amos and Foyster provides useful starting points to explore relationships between parents and their adolescent and adult offspring, but also leaves unanswered questions. Although Ben-Amos rightly highlighted the reciprocal nature of relationships between children and parents, she made little attempt to use gender as a category of analysis to differentiate between mothers and fathers, daughters and sons. Additionally, her emphasis on the unequal nature of the reciprocal relationship perhaps underplayed the levels of affection that adolescent and adult children felt for their parents. Foyster examined mostly the elite and middling sorts, and similarly did not explicitly draw out differences between the roles of mothers and fathers. Her focus on cases of marital breakdown also leaves an impression of exceptional rather

¹⁵² Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.117.

¹⁵³ I. K. Ben-Amos, 'Reciprocal Bonding: Parents and their Offspring in Early Modern England', *Journal of Family History*, 25:3 (July 2000), pp.291-312.

¹⁵⁴ E. Foyster, 'Parenting Was for Life, Not Just for Childhood: The Role of Parents in the Married Lives of their Children in Early Modern England', *History*, 86:283 (2001), pp.313-27.

than everyday parental intervention. The remainder of this chapter aims to explore some of these issues in more depth.

Several clerics believed the influence of parents over the lives of their children should not end when they left the family household. William Gouge believed that 'a prouident care for their childrens good' extended 'to all times and to all things' from infancy to adulthood, whilst parents lived, but also 'after their departure'.¹⁵⁵ Matthew Griffith advised parents to 'honestly endeavour to lay up something for the future maintenance of their children'.¹⁵⁶ Daniel Cawdrey believed that parents ought to have provided their adult children with 'fit callings' and 'fit matches in marriage ... both which require, preparation of a Stock and Portion'. Cawdrey told parents that before they died they should offer 'good counsel, precepts, directions ... faithfull prayers and blessings', and ensure that a 'faithful friend' acted as a surrogate parent.¹⁵⁷ Thomas Hilder deemed it a parental duty to provide children with 'some honest Callings ... in Church or Common-wealth, wherein they may both do, and receive good'. Parents were to find God-fearing masters for their offspring and fit them to 'such Callings as they are most capable of' so long as these required 'no more stock of money to manage them than thou art like to leave them', otherwise 'when their time is out they can make no benefit by their Trades, unlesse they remaine in as state of Servitude by working under others'. Parents were also to provide children 'with fit marriages, in seasonable time'. Marriage was to be delayed until children possessed 'fulnesse and maturity of body', 'solidity of understanding', and took 'delight ... in keeping company with the contrary sex', but before their children married parents were to bestow on them some 'competent maintenance'.¹⁵⁸ All the authors appear to have

¹⁵⁵ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, p.505.

¹⁵⁶ Griffith, *Bethel*, p.340.

¹⁵⁷ D. Cawdrey, *Family Reformation Promoted* (London, 1656), pp.75-76.

¹⁵⁸ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, pp.150-53.

assumed that such duties were the joint responsibility of a married couple; although in practice this would not always have been so.

The ability of parents to maintain contact with children after they left home was made more problematic because London was a city of migrants, many of them living some distance from their mothers. Edward Barlow remembered how his forlorn mother stood at the cottage door when he departed for London.¹⁵⁹ However, moving to the capital did not necessarily mean people lost contact with their mothers. Some women migrated with their mothers, while others moved separately, specifically to live with them.¹⁶⁰ Some adult children cohabited with their parents as lodgers and contributed rent, or lived under the same roof 'in quality of a servant', as was the case with William Woodbridge.¹⁶¹ Even if mother and offspring were separated physically this did not mean they were disconnected emotionally. Adam Martindale told how his mother's heart was 'like to have broke for extremity of sorrow' when his sister, Jane, 'irregularly' left Lancashire for London. Adam was concerned about his mother and Jane as 'both of them were fond to me'. When her mother became sick Jane returned home 'with all speed', but 'found her dead to her inexorable sorrow'. Although they lived at opposite ends of the country a strong emotional bond had survived between the two women.¹⁶² Men might also keep in contact with their mothers. When Samuel Pepys heard his mother was very ill Elizabeth went to visit her, and Samuel wrote that his heart was very sad. She visited Samuel and Elizabeth a few years later when in better health. 'I am glad to see her', wrote Pepys, 'but my business ... keeps me from paying the respect I ought to at her first coming'. Pepys's mother spent most of her visit with Elizabeth, visited an old

¹⁵⁹ Houlbrooke, *English Family*, p.184.

¹⁶⁰ V. Brodsky Elliott, 'Single Women in the London Marriage Market: Age, Status and Mobility, 1598-1619' in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), pp.91, 93, 98.

¹⁶¹ Macfarlane, *Love and Marriage*, p.79; OBP, 7 December 1681, t16811207-1.

¹⁶² R. Parkinson (ed.), *The Life of Adam Martindale* (Manchester, 1845), pp.7, 17-18.

servant and travelled by coach to Islington. Before she departed a few weeks later Samuel gave her money, and she asked him to patch up a family rift by forgiving his brother John, which Samuel would not do. Pepys knew this troubled her, and despite his kind words to his mother she left 'in a great deal of sorrow'. When she died in March 1667, and Samuel discovered that her last words were "God bless my poor Sam!" he was reduced to tears.¹⁶³

For women, successful parenting involved mothers and adult children having a sense of their mutual obligations to each other. Many maintained contact and resorted to the other party in times of need. When Mary Peirce confessed to stealing seventeen shillings, a silver tankard, and silver spoons and forks, she explained that she had used the items to obtain clothes and fruit to send to her mother in the country.¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Pepys maintained contact with her mother, bringing her apples, neats, tongues, and brains one January afternoon in 1665.¹⁶⁵ Henry Newcome and his wife both went to London to bind their son Daniel as an apprentice, and their later decision to find him a new master was taken jointly.¹⁶⁶ The mothers of several of the maids who entered service with the Pepyses accompanied their daughters when they came to be hired, and when Jane and Mary Mercer left service they returned to live with their mothers.¹⁶⁷ When his maid Su fell ill Pepys sent for her mother, who sought out lodgings and a nurse for her next door to where she lived. 'She dare not for the parish sake ... take her into her own house' wrote Pepys, possibly because she would be a charge on the poor rates or because of the fear of disease, or because London vestries

¹⁶³ Pepys, *Diary*, 14 September 1660, i, p.244; 10 May 1665, 23 May 1665, 30 May 1665, 22 June 1665, vi, pp.99, 107-08, 112, 133-34; 27 March 1667, viii, p.134.

¹⁶⁴ OBP, 6 April 1687, t16870406-10.

¹⁶⁵ Pepys, *Diary*, 9 January 1665, vi, p.7.

¹⁶⁶ *The Autobiography of Henry Newcome* ed. R. Parkinson, p.171-78 cited in Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.71.

¹⁶⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 26 August 1661, 16 October 1661, ii, pp.162, 196; 29 August 1664, v, p.257; 23 June 1666, vii, p.175.

discouraged the practice of intergenerational cohabitation by threatening to withdraw relief to the aged poor who allowed younger relatives to share their dwellings.¹⁶⁸

Adult daughters often sought help from their mothers when they were due to give birth. Jane Josselin journeyed from Essex to London to be with her daughter, Elizabeth Smith, when her first child was due.¹⁶⁹ When the midwife Elizabeth Wyatt delivered Christian Hoare, Elizabeth's daughter, Catherine, was present, and Annette Cox delivered the daughter of one Mrs Bennett at the mother's house on the bank side of the Shambles.¹⁷⁰ When young single women became pregnant, they might travel to be with their mothers, such as the servant girl in Islington, dismissed from service for being seven months pregnant, who fled to her mother in Chiswick. Twelve days after giving birth she returned to London to find a new post. When questioned in court she confessed that after she gave birth, her mother had buried the child, which presumably had been stillborn since neither woman was prosecuted.¹⁷¹ Mothers testified in court on behalf of their daughters as well. The mother of Mary MacDonald gave evidence against Hugh Evice, accusing him of getting Mary drunk and raping her. Katherine Burroughs supported her daughter, Isabel, when Isabel's master, William Gould, took her to court in 1582. Gould claimed Katherine had spread rumours about him abusing Isabel, whilst Katherine alleged that William had made her daughter a whore.¹⁷²

In December 1653 the Middlesex sessions heard two cases of abuse of apprentices in which mothers gave evidence on behalf of their offspring. Anne Neale of Limehouse appealed to the court about her son Thomas, who had been apprenticed to James Larkin for seven years. She claimed that Thomas had been so badly beaten that he was unable to walk properly, had spat blood for a fortnight, and asked for him to be released from the apprenticeship. The court agreed, but asked to hear Larkin's

¹⁶⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 3 May 1666, vii, p.116; Schen, 'Strategies', pp.22-23.

¹⁶⁹ A. Macfarlane (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616-1683* (London, 1976), p.615.

¹⁷⁰ GL MS 9057/1, fos. 236, 230.

¹⁷¹ OBP, 10 December 1679, t16791210-13.

¹⁷² OBP, 31 May 1688, t16880531-26; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.75.

story. This caused them to change their mind, and they ordered Thomas to serve out his term. Anne was married but as her husband John was a mariner he may have been at sea and thus unable to intervene. Mary Stanley, a widow, appealed on behalf of Katherine Stanley, probably her daughter, who was apprenticed to Ralph Kent of Giles without Cripplegate, a buttonmaker. Mary deposed that Ralph beats Katherine so harshly that she was 'black and blue in several parts of her body'. Mary obtained several female witnesses to confirm this, including Ralph Kent's aunt, who claimed her nephew beat the girl with a broomstick. The court discharged Katherine from the apprenticeship.¹⁷³

Sick and forward thinking mothers were sometimes able to provide for their offspring before they died. Elizabeth Harrington bequeathed twenty-four shillings for her son, John, to be apprenticed to Robert Kilborne of Blackfriars, and Agnes Fulgram left five pounds for her son, William, 'to be rayased out of such poor implements and household stuffe as I shall leave'.¹⁷⁴ On a grander scale, in *Eastward Ho* Gertrude has been left land by her grandmother worth a hundred pounds a year.¹⁷⁵ The vestrymen of St Alphage London Wall assigned half the goods of Widow Price for the care of her lame son and the other half to Thomas Fysher whilst he cared for her other son, Thomas. Fysher was to give Price the money 'att his lawfull age'.¹⁷⁶

With regard to a daughter, some mothers sought to provide a suitable husband instead of financial assistance, and Margaret Ezell has argued that such activities were part of an early modern 'pattern of matriarchy' amongst the elite.¹⁷⁷ When Katherine Stubbes was aged fifteen her father had already died, and it was her mother who arranged her marriage to Philip Stubbes.¹⁷⁸ Equally mothers sought to ward off

¹⁷³ LMA MJ/SBB/126/34; LMA MJ/SBB/126/35. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for these references.

¹⁷⁴ GL MS 819/1, fo. 105; Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London', pp.147-48.

¹⁷⁵ Chapman, Jonson, Marston, *Eastward Ho*, I. ii. 87, p.76

¹⁷⁶ GL MS 1431/1, fo. 10.

¹⁷⁷ Ezell, *Patriarch's Wife*, p.33.

¹⁷⁸ Stubbes, *Christall Glasse*, p.4.

unwanted suitors, about which some men complained vehemently.¹⁷⁹ After marriage mothers provided their daughters with help in setting up home. *A Fairing for Young-Men and Maids* depicted female relatives providing household necessities to help Thomas and Mary, a newly married couple. The mother gave them a small portion, a kettle and a warming pan, whilst the grandmother provided a cradle and the sister a ladle.¹⁸⁰

We also find some mothers backing their married offspring in conflicts with spouses, actions that risked bringing them into conflict with their sons- and daughters-in-law. Gilbert Lidegelie, a waterman from Shadwell in Stepney, appeared before the sessions 'for abusinge his wife's mother.'¹⁸¹ Mrs Howlett complained to Samuel Pepys about her son-in-law, Michael Mitchell, because he abused her daughter 'and makes a slave of her, and his mother is one that encourages him in it'.¹⁸² Michael Mitchell was not the only son to be encouraged to acts of violence in this way. As has been shown, motherhood was a focus for interpersonal conflicts between women, and continued to be so after children reached adulthood. Susanna Foster appeared before the sessions accused of having encouraged her son, Thomas, to maltreat Dorothea Prettye, 'a woman of good and honourable estate and condition'. Thomas had behaved badly to her on numerous occasions, so Dorothea had gone to Clerkenwell to visit one Francis Clement who she hoped would correct his ill conduct. Susanna accused Dorothea of being 'a brawler and disturber of the peace, having no care for the discipline and good education of her said son, but rather as a woman utterly devoid of feminine modesty', uttering 'divers scandalous and opprobrious words' at Dorothea before inflicting numerous blows to her head and face. Dorothea tried to withdraw from the house, but Susanna held the door shut, and in a high voice uttered

¹⁷⁹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.153-57.

¹⁸⁰ 'A Fairing for Young-Men and Maids', *Pepys* iii, p.131.

¹⁸¹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*, pp.44-45.

¹⁸² Pepys, *Diary*, 14 October 1667, viii, p.479.

‘nay shee shall not goe yet shee shall haue more ere she goe’.¹⁸³ If mothers interfered in the relationships of their married offspring, sometimes the end result was a domino effect, upsetting a series of individuals.

The willingness to assist (or interfere) was not only the assumed prerogative of mothers since adult daughters also intervened in the lives of their mothers, sometimes with equally disastrous consequences. When Sibel Thomas and the mother of Mary Hut exchanged ‘some angry words’, Mary responded, and gave Sibel ‘such bad language as provoked her to strike her, and having thrown her in the Kenel, to tread upon her’. Mary died a fortnight later, but Sibel was acquitted because Mary was deemed to have been ‘a sickly maid’ and no bruising was found.¹⁸⁴ Sometimes women had to decide between conflicting loyalties to husbands and mothers. In *Bartholomew Fair* John Littlewit wishes to go to the fair to see a production of the puppet play, but his wife, Win, tells him her mother will not allow it. Littlewit hatches a plot that involves Win pretending to be pregnant. He believes Dame Purecraft will do anything to please her daughter, and therefore if Win craves a pie only obtainable from the fair she will have to allow them to go. Win agrees to comply, but warns John that her mother ‘is not a wise wilful widow for nothing’ and that she has ‘something o’ the mother’ in her as well.¹⁸⁵ Win acts as a good wife and obeys her husband, but her loyalties are divided and her respect for her mother is evident.

Mothers did not always side with their adult daughters. The marriage of Jane and John Lawson was interfered in by Jane’s mother, who believed Jane treated John badly, claiming that he would be ‘a mad Man or worse if he did not leave her’ if she continued to behave in such a manner. ‘And then ... what will you do?’ she asked. ‘I

¹⁸³ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, p.165.

¹⁸⁴ OBP, 13 April 1681, t16810413-2.

¹⁸⁵ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, I. v. 129-50, p.510.

will do well enuff without him or you either, no question of it', replied Jane. 'To my knowledge John is no common drunkard', responded her mother angrily, telling Jane to indulge John's drinking 'when it is so seldom'. 'You are to blame more then he', she told Jane. 'You see you want for nothing neither at home nor abroad, neither for your Belly nor Apparel ... What would you say if this uproar of yours should take away your husbands livelihood amongst his Neighbors?' 'You act very imprudently, if he looses his imploy you may e'n go a begging'. 'I know not how you and Three small Children will be maintained without his labour'. Jane reacted badly. 'You may preach at home as long as you will' she told her mother, 'but in my house you shall not', and threw her mother out.¹⁸⁶ Jane clearly resented such maternal intervention in her marital life, but her mother may have considered her advice beneficial 'tough love'. Antagonisms between mothers and adult daughters could be far worse if the women cohabited, and on many occasions they came to blows or worse.¹⁸⁷ Eleanor Neal was accused of murdering her mother, Anne, by giving her ratsbane mixed in beer.¹⁸⁸ One sixteen-year-old girl was asked why she killed her mother, and replied that she was 'very sickly and troublesome' and that 'she did it to be rid of her'.¹⁸⁹

Whilst some daughters resented their mothers' interference, sons sometimes also sought actively to disassociate themselves from their mothers. In *Michaelmas Term* Lethe fears his mother will come to London and shame him by revealing his poverty-stricken past. When Mother Gruel comes looking for her son, she finds Lethe but does not recognise him, commenting ironically that he should not call her mother, 'such a simple old woman as I am'. Lethe likens his mother cruelly to a sickness, and Shortyard puns that 'the mother is a pestilent, wilful, troublesome sickness'.¹⁹⁰ In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* the tables are turned when Maudline embarrasses her son

¹⁸⁶ *A True and Sad Relation Of Two Wicked and Bloody Murthers* (London, 16??), pp.3-4.

¹⁸⁷ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.176.

¹⁸⁸ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume IV*, p.66.

¹⁸⁹ *Horrid News From St. Martins: Or, Unheard of Murder and Poyson* (London, 1677), p.6.

¹⁹⁰ Middleton, *Michaelmas Term*, I. i. 240-96; III. i. 207-08, pp. 78-79, 105

Tim, a pretentious student from Cambridge. Tim protests that Maudline orders him to enter the lying-in chamber, telling her, with perhaps unconscious innuendo, that it is against university law for him 'to thrust 'mongst married women'. When offered plums Tim complains of being 'served like a child' and is horrified when Maudline says she will make his Cambridge tutor whip him.¹⁹¹ Middleton depicts men who are seeking to fashion adult identities for themselves, and who fear that their mothers will prevent them from doing so because of their poverty or coddling.

A major factor in the ageing process for women was the shift in identity from mother with young children present in her home to being a mother with adult children living apart from her. The behaviour of adult children towards elderly mothers might not always measure up to the expectations of the women concerned and issues such as economic security might bring widowed mothers into conflict with their children.¹⁹² In June 1652 Philip Porter was ordered to keep the peace towards his mother, Olave Porter, but before he was due to appear at the next sessions Philip 'did disturb and threaten his mother and some of her friends in a very rude and unnatural manner with wicked oaths before her door'.¹⁹³ The story of the widow of Watling Street, told in two ballads, illustrates how mother and son could behave very differently to each other. When the widow's husband was alive her son was imprisoned for debt. His father would not help him but his mother found the money to free him. After his father's death the son inherited the family property and threw his mother and sisters onto the streets, arguing that the house had been left to him and that his father had intended his mother to pay him annual rent. In addition he argued that she had been 'a secret harlot' and kept company with 'lewd ruffians' who were the fathers of his three bastard sisters. The case came to Star Chamber where the son provided

¹⁹¹ Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, III. ii. 116-21, 126-37, pp.36-37.

¹⁹² See, for example, A. Kugler, "'I feel myself decay apace": Old age in the diary of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)' in L. Botelho and P. Thane (eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), pp.68-70, 75-77.

¹⁹³ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, p.210.

witnesses who claimed sixteen years earlier they had spied his mother with three men through a garden hedge. Other stories emerged of sexual liaisons in Bristol and Bath, but the balladeer noted that it was 'shame for a child to speake ill of his mother'.¹⁹⁴

Motherhood was a lifelong duty, and one that most women seemed happy or at least content to continue even after their offspring had left home. The advice of the conduct literature that parents should provide young women and men with a suitable job with a good master, and a lump sum of money to enable them to marry and set up a household, appears frequently to have overlapped with actual behaviour. In the case of daughters, mothers realised the importance of finding them husbands, and those who lived in relatively close proximity often provided mutual aid, especially in terms of food and household items. More problematic was the intervention of mothers in the lives of their married offspring, not always welcomed, whilst daughters sometimes had to decide whether their first loyalties lay with their husbands or their mothers.

Conclusion

With the lack of reliable contraception in early modern England, motherhood was to a large extent an experience that few married women would have been able to avoid, and it often caused women numerous anxieties and problems. Nonetheless, becoming a mother was an aspiration for most women, partly for biological reasons, but also because pregnancy and childbirth caused friends, family and neighbours to re-evaluate a woman, affording her greater respect and bringing a new social status alongside her new responsibilities.

The good mother was expected to ensure her children were brought up as good Christians, a process requiring both love and discipline. Motherhood also entailed

¹⁹⁴ 'The first part of the Widdow of Watling Street & her three daughters, & how her wicked son accused her to be an harlot, and his sisters bastards' and 'The second part of the Widdow of Watling Street & her three daughters', *Pepys i*, pp.140-41.

feeding and clothing the children, and many poorer women had to struggle to achieve this, sometimes encouraged by parish officers and hospitals who believed that mothers were on the whole best suited to care for their children. Church, state, and society collaborated to reinforce the importance of the bonds between mothers and children, and many mothers maintained contact with their adult offspring after the latter left home, continuing to provide them with love and practical assistance. Mothers sought to advise rather than discipline adult offspring, sometimes finding the former as difficult to achieve as the latter had been.

Although motherhood was arduous and might continue into old age, by being good mothers women earned the love and respect of their children, and cemented their roles as respectable matriarchs within their communities. Motherhood was a topic on which almost every woman held an opinion, and a duty many struggled to fulfil on a daily basis. Mothers often visited the households of other women to seek help and advice in caring for their children. But women also had numerous other domestic responsibilities by which they were also judged, and these provide the focus for the next chapter.

4. Housewifery and Domestic Management

The woman, the name of a huswife doth win,
By keeping hir house, and of doings therein.
And shee that with husband, will quietly dwell:
Must thinke on this lesson, and follow it well.¹

Introduction

One February morning in 1667 Samuel Pepys 'lay long in bed, talking with pleasure with my poor wife how she used to make coal fires and wash my foul clothes with her own hands for me ... for which I ought for ever to love and admire her, and do, and perswade myself she would do the same thing again if God should reduce us to it'.² Elizabeth does not strike the reader of Samuel's diary as an exceptionally diligent housewife, but the efforts she made were clearly valued by Pepys. This chapter explores how the household-related tasks women performed helped them construct honourable and respectable reputations and maintain good social credit. What were the practical qualities that men sought for in a prospective wife, and how far could a married woman enjoy autonomy and authority in managing household affairs and supervising female and male servants?

Women's work comprised a huge range of household-related tasks that helped maintain their families. Anne Laurence described them as 'jobs that get done all the time and are not therefore worthy of comment'.³ The term 'wife' referred primarily to a woman's work duties rather than her marital status, and whilst married women fulfilled such duties most often, single women and men might also practise

¹ T. Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (London, 1614), p.69.

² Pepys, *Diary*, 25 February 1667, viii, pp.82-83.

³ A. Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History* (London, 1994), p.109.

housewifery.⁴ Girls and young women acquired housewifery skills at home, school, and in domestic service, with the poorer ones bound to wives of crafts- and tradesmen in housewifery apprenticeships.⁵ Sir Robert Filmer noted three ways in which women could be made to learn housewifery: 'if they be broken of their will when they are young'; by being put into service 'farre from home'; and 'if they be not married until they be skilfull in huswiferie'. Filmer also suggested three situations in which women could retain such skills: by marrying husbands who were neither 'spendthrifts nor meddlers within doores'; if their mothers did not order them about; and if they did not change their servants yearly because they lacked the confidence to correct them, and thus had to appoint new ones each year.⁶ Men contemplating marriage usually took into account the potential earning power, skills, energy, and health of women.⁷ The extent of female domestic authority was wide-ranging, and Margaret Ezell has argued that interpretations offered by historians of domestic life have 'restricted the practice of the patriarch's wife more than the actual practice did'.⁸ Lena Cowen Orlin noted similarly, that despite the best efforts of conduct book authors to delineate separate spheres of household authority, the existence of overlapping and conflicting domestic duties could make the house 'a contested space'.⁹

Several historians of early modern England have noted that housewifery was among the contemporary criteria used to determine female credit and respectability. Miranda Chaytor commented that if the shame a woman felt in being called a slut justified her bringing a court case, 'a scrupulous respect for property, industry and

⁴ J. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), p.81.

⁵ I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth in early modern England* (New Haven and London, 1994), pp.133, 136-37, 140; M. McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.133-30.

⁶ R. Filmer, 'In Praise of the Vertuous Wife' in M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill and London, 1987), p.176.

⁷ A. Macfarlane, *Love and Marriage in England 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), p.271.

⁸ Ezell, *Patriarch's Wife*, p.162.

⁹ L. C. Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), p.102.

competence in the household ... constituted the basis of honour'. Chaytor described the household as a predominantly female domain wherein women tended animals and children, cooked, washed, brewed and span, and argued that it was largely in this context that female reputations as a wives and diligent workers were gauged.¹⁰ Anthony Fletcher noted that 'an effective household manager was a prerequisite for the kind of life many men wished to lead' and that housewifery was regarded as an essentially female skill by which all women were judged.¹¹ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have argued that women conceptualised female maturity mainly in terms of marriage, running a household, raising children, and overseeing servants.¹² Garthine Walker emphasised that female honour 'resided in the fulfilment of a wife's household duties' and argued that 'the role of 'good' housewife enabled women to assert and defend honour, whilst the term 'idle huswife' was one of insult.¹³ Historians therefore are broadly agreed in recognising that domestic management skills were a major element in the construction of a woman's good name.

However, life in London made ideals of good housewifery problematic. Peter Earle believed that the role of housewife was essentially 'honourable and fulfilling', but that housewifery was less wide-ranging and fulfilling in urban areas because many goods and services were bought on the market, rather than produced in the household. Increasing specialisation of work in the later seventeenth century forced many women into, often low-paid, waged labour, giving them less time to fulfil domestic duties.¹⁴ Clerical writers drew on images of the good wife from Proverbs to stress the benefits

¹⁰ M. Chaytor, 'Household and Kinship: Ryton in the late 16th and early 17th centuries', *History Workshop Journal*, 10 (Autumn 1980), p.26. The OED cites early modern examples of the word 'slut' being used to mean both 'a woman of dirty, slovenly, or untidy habits or appearance; a foul slattern', and 'a woman of a low or loose character; a bold or impudent girl; a hussy, jade', but apparently the word could be used playfully as well, 'without serious imputation of bad qualities'.

¹¹ Fletcher, *Gender*, pp.174, 226.

¹² Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.124.

¹³ G. Walker, 'Expanding the boundaries of female honour in early modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1996), p.238.

¹⁴ Earle, *City Full of People*, pp.107-13. The current research of Amy Erickson aims to re-evaluate Earle's ideas about the female labour marker in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

of housewifery as different from but not less valued than husbandry, but such images were conservative and often located in imagined, timeless rural settings.¹⁵ Similarly many ballads with rural settings suggested that London women neglected their duties as housewives. One ballad depicting the attractions and vices of London compared a lazy housewife with a fat sow in a filthy sty, and the female narrator of *The Countrey Lasse* claimed

That which your City Damsells scorne,
We hold our chiefest Jewell,
Without to worke at Day and come
Within to bake and brew well.¹⁶

Such criticisms were for the most part inaccurate since London women appear to have valued good housewifery as much as their rural counterparts. Margaret Owen was bound over to answer the complaint of Margaret Wayle, who alleged that Owen had said that 'if her [Wayle's] husband died, she starved him, and would hang for it', implying that Wayle had totally failed to discharge her wifely duties.¹⁷ Alice Wilkinson was far from being a good wife to her husband Toby, but the failings she was accused of serve to highlight the domestic expectations placed upon London women. Anna Price claimed Alice had been 'very unkind and undutifull' to her late husband 'and would not suffer him to eate any meat with her nor lye in bed with her for ye space of 7 yeares'. The pair argued constantly, and Anna alleged that on the evening of 4 October 1636 Alice would not allow Toby into the house. Since Anna was Toby's mistress she was probably biased towards her lover, and some country women might have argued that the incident confirmed their worst suspicions about London women.¹⁸ However, Anna's disgust at the behaviour of Alice suggests that

¹⁵ Ezell, *Patriarch's Wife*, p.38.

¹⁶ 'A Mad Crue; Or, That shall be tryde', *Pepys i*, p.445; 'The Countrey Lasse', *Pepys i*, p.268.

¹⁷ LMA MJ/SR/1191/114. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for this reference.

¹⁸ GL MS 9057/1, fos. 144-45.

providing meals for one's husband, and fulfilling his emotional and sexual desires, were duties expected of all wives in early modern England.

Looking for a wife: the virtues of housewifery

The renewed emphasis on marriage as an ideal state of human relations following the Reformation encouraged clerical writers to praise housewives. Robert Cleaver wrote that 'there is nothing that giveth so much as doth a good wife ... for a mans wife is the fellowe and comforter of all cares and thoughts, and doth more faithfull and true service unto him, then either maid-servant or man-servant, the which will serve men for feare, or else for wages: but thy wife will be ledde only by love'.¹⁹ Such praise also came from female pamphleteers. Susanna Jesserson described a wife as

a help-meet in the cares of the world, and toils of basiness, and the most agreeable diversion at hours of leisure; an inseparable second self that mitigates all a mans misfortunes by dividing and sharing them, and doubles his joys and prosperities by an equal participation; The Guardian of her husbands honour, and the conduit through which successive nobility derives its glories, and to whose integrity the law commits the conveyance both of Titles and inheritances.²⁰

Constantia Munda claimed that 'nothing is more sweet than a good wife' and that 'he that hath a good wife, hath a merry life'.²¹ Rachel Speght believed that God created woman as a solace to man and to provide him with counsel, 'participate of his sorrowes, partake of his pleasures, and as a good yoke fellow beare part of his burthen'.²² Some godly wives fulfilled such ideals. Margaret Ducke of Blackfriars

¹⁹ R. Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1598), p.155.

²⁰ S. Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors. Or: The Best Wife In the World for a Penny* (London, 1675), p.3.

²¹ C. Munda, *The Worming of a mad Dogge Or, A Soppe for Cerberus the Jaylor of Hell* (London, 1617), p.29.

²² R. Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus, The Cynicall Bayter of, and foule mouthed Barker against Evahs Sex* (London, 1617), pp.3, 11-12.

followed Solomon's advice and did 'imploy her self, in looking well to the waies of her household, and not eating the bread of idlenesse'.²³ John Gillis has argued that the appeal of being a wife consisted of entering a heterosexual relationship, but also of becoming a dame and mistress, exercising considerable household authority.²⁴ Plays and ballads depicted young women eager to assume the responsibilities of housewifery. In *The Wise-woman of Hogsdon* Luce wishes to be honoured 'with the chaste title of a modest wife'.²⁵ *Give me the Willow Garland* told of a sixteen-year-old maid longing to be married and assume domestic responsibilities by carrying the keys to cupboards and chests.²⁶

William Gouge believed that very young people had 'no need of marriage, nor yet are well fit for marriage' and 'if they forbear some yeares longer, it will be much better for the parties themselves that marrie, for the children while they bring forth, and for the family whereof they are members'. In his opinion any couple considering marriage should be 'of ripe yeeres, fit to give consent, and able to performe marriage duties' since 'equalitie in yeeres maketh married persons more fit for procreation of children, for a mutuall performance of marriage duties each to other'. However, Gouge acknowledged such equality was not 'over strictly to be taken', and deemed 'disparitie of five or ten, or somewhat more yeeres' acceptable 'especially if the excesse of yeeres be on the husbands part'.²⁷

Marrying at a young age was considered to be problematic for several reasons. Mid-sixteenth-century legislation preventing anyone being admitted to the freedom of the City of London or from beginning an apprenticeship that would end before the age

²³ W. Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon preached by Dr Gouge of Black-Friers London, in Cheswicke Church, August 24. 1646. At the funeralls of Mrs Margaret Ducke wife of Dr Ducke, one of the Masters of requests to his Majesty* (London, 1646), p.27.

²⁴ Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p.57.

²⁵ T. Heywood, *The Wise-woman of Hogsdon* (London, 1638), I. ii. 93-99 in P. Merchant (ed.) *Thomas Heywood: Three marriage plays* (Manchester and New York, 1996), p.47.

²⁶ 'Give me the Willow-Garland; Or, The Maidens Former Fear, and Latter Comfort', *Pepys* iii, p.94.

²⁷ W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), pp.180, 188.

of twenty-four was designed to prevent the setting up of households headed by 'young and unskilful' people.²⁸ William Crompton deemed such marriages to be exploitative and considered it 'a dangerous practice and intolerable in a well-governed state, to force an union betweenne young yeeres; where there is no actuall power to chuse, nor iudgement to discerne'.²⁹ Other writers condemned youthful unions on the grounds of impracticality. Thomas Gataker noted 'the fondness of such parents as ioyne their daughters to heads before they are able to bee helpers, yea oft match them to an head ere they are able to dress their own head, much lesse to afford any good helpe to their married head'. Gataker castigated parents 'that bring [their daughters] up so in idlenesse and dissolutenesse, that they are good for nothing when they are married, but to sit in the shop as a babe on a stall, to see and to be seene, or as an image in the house, that have lims without use'.³⁰ Susanna Jesserson did not prescribe an ideal age at which spouses should marry, but instead described a good wife as 'a young mans Mistris to advise him, a middle aged mans companion to solace him, and an old Mans Nurse to cherish him', illustrating the changing role of the wife over the life-course.³¹

Thomas Hilder deemed it equally problematic to marry either a wife who was too young or one who was too old, 'for the Girle stands in need of a Dame to instruct her in all points of womanhood to fit her to be a good wife, and the old woman stands in need of a Nurse to waite on her in her decrepid Age.' However, Hilder considered it better to marry the younger woman, 'for a girle may in time become a woman fit to beare children and guide the house ... but the old woman will be more and more unfit'. The good wife was to be of childbearing age, 'of an able and healthfull constitution', and not more than ten years older than her husband. The ideal situation was when 'a man about twenty-six yeares old shall be married to a Maid of about

²⁸ Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p.212.

²⁹ W. Crompton, *A Wedding Ring, fitted to the finger of euery paire that haue or shall meete in the feare of God* (London, 1632), p.27.

³⁰ T. Gataker, *Marriage Duties briefly couched together* (London, 1620), p.21.

³¹ Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors*, p.3.

twenty, or a man about thirty yeares old shall marry with a maid about twenty foure'.³²

Questions of wealth were also important in determining when and whom one should marry. William Gouge suggested spouses needed 'some equalitie in outward estate and wealth ... for if a man of great wealth be married to a poore woman, he will thinke to make her as his maid-servant ... [and] if a rich woman mary a poore man, she will looke to be the master ... so as the order which God hath established will be cleane peruerted: and the honour of marriage laid in the dust.' Gouge believed that 'great portions make many women proud, daintie, lavish, idle, and carelesse' and believed 'a man were much better even for helpe of his outward estate, to marry a prudent, sober, thriftie, carefull, diligent wife, though with a small portion.'³³ Daniel Rogers defined a good wife as 'loyall, chaste, wise, provident', and able to save her marriage portion within seven years.³⁴ Thomas Hilder advised men to consider if a woman was 'expensive, wastefull, profuse, and prodigall in her carriage', as well as the size of her dowry.³⁵

Pamphleteers also wrote of economic considerations in choosing a wife. Joseph Swetnam reiterated the proverbial wisdom that 'there is more belonges to housekeeping then fower bare legges in a bed: a man cannot live with his handes in his bosome, nor buy meat in the market for honestie without money: where there is nothing but bare walles, it is a fit house to breed beggers into the world'. 'If wealth be wanting hot love will soon be colde, and your hot desires will soon be quenched with the smoke of poverty', he warned.³⁶ *The Good Womans Champion* described

³² T. Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell: or Seasonable Advice both to Unmarried and Married Persons* (London, 1653), pp.44-45.

³³ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp.189-90.

³⁴ D. Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour: Or, The Mutuall Crowne and Comfort of Godly, Loyall and Chaste Marriage* (London, 1642), p.27.

³⁵ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, p.52.

³⁶ J. Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (London, 1615), pp.6-7.

‘the common custom now adaies among most men to hearken after wives with a great portion, & rich friends, never regarding how she is qualified, or whether she be addicted to vertue or vice ... a poore woman, be she never so virtuous, is not regarded with them’.³⁷ Henry Peacham believed that ‘women of the meanest condition, may make good Wives’ but that ‘such poor ones oftentimes prove so impious and proud, as they make no Conscience to abuse, insult over, and make silly Fools of their Husbands, as by letting and disposing of their Lands, gathering up their Rents, putting away, and entertaining what servants they list’.³⁸

Balladeers and playwrights also deemed wealth important. *The Downfal of Pride* told of the daughter of a London merchant with a marriage portion of fifteen hundred pounds who predictably attracted many suitors. In *Love and Lie Down* the heroine tells her suitor she thinks he will not marry her due to her lack of possessions.³⁹ *Londons Lotterie* encouraged maids ‘that have but portions small’ to ‘cast in your Lottes with willing hand’ in order to raise their dowries, and suggested that widows and wives might ‘advance both you and yours’ by playing the lottery. Another ballad about a pregnant single girl described her offering her lover her self, her goods ‘and what I might procure’ in the hope that he would marry her.⁴⁰ In *A Mad World, My Masters Follywit* claims ‘maids without coin are caudles without spice’, whilst in *A Trick to Catch the Old One* Hoard describes his wife as ‘large in possessions, but spacious in content: she’s rich, she’s young, she’s fair, she’s wise; when I wake I think of her lands – that revives me; when I go to bed, I dream of her

³⁷ I. A, *The Good Womans Champion Or, A Defence for the weaker Vessell, being fit for Widdowes, Wives, Maidens, or others to read or heare* (London, 1650), p.4.

³⁸ H. Peacham, *Worth of a Penny: Or, A Caution to Keep Money* (London, 1677), p.11.

³⁹ ‘The Downfal of Pride’, *Pepys* ii, p.59; ‘Laugh and lie Down: Or, A Dialogue’, *Pepys* iii, p.35.

⁴⁰ ‘Londons Lotterie’ (London, 1612), *Pepys* i, p.190; ‘A Love-sick maids long, lately beguild, By a run-away Lover that left her with Childe’, *Pepys* i, p.371.

beauty – and that’s enough for me’.⁴¹ A wealthy wife was evidently a good thing, but youthfulness, beauty and wisdom were also valued.

After a couple had married concerns regarding the appropriate boundaries of female authority and agency became of great importance. Women regarded the authority granted them by their husbands as consisting of negotiable privileges, and for those who valued their personal reputations the character and limits of their subjugation were important.⁴² Few women equated subordination with submissiveness, and most marriages entailed some negotiated accommodation between social norms and factors specific to the union.⁴³ Emanuel van Meteren believed that the household was very much a female realm, and that women had ‘the free management of the house or housekeeping’, though his was not a universal opinion.⁴⁴

Thomas Gataker believed a wife should ‘learn to know her place and her part; and to fashion her minde and her will, her disposition and her practice accordingly’, even if she was ‘of a greater spirit, and in some respect of better parts, though she bring much with her, though the main estate come by her’. However, Gataker also acknowledged that a wife should be allowed to provide seasonable advice and admonish her husband in matters ‘properly her part’ if this was done ‘with due respect and regard of the husbands person and place’.⁴⁵ Ester Sowernam believed wives who obeyed the orders of their husbands increased their own glory, ‘for nothing is more acceptable before God then to obey’.⁴⁶ Robert Cleaver told wives neither to ‘prouoke

⁴¹ T. Middleton, *A Mad World, My Masters* (London, c.1605), 5:2, 278-79 in M. Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World, My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), p.65; T. Middleton, *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (London, 1605) 4:4, 4-8 in M. Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World, My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), pp.181-82.

⁴² Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.135.

⁴³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.72-73.

⁴⁴ W. B. Rye (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First* (London, 1865), p.72.

⁴⁵ Gataker, *Marriage Duties*, pp.10-11, 15.

⁴⁶ E. Sowernam, *Ester hath hang'd Haman: Or An Answer to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignment of Women* (London, 1617), p.9.

their husbands by disobedience, in matters that may bee performed without offence to God' nor 'refuse in a matter that may trouble household peace and quiet'. 'If the obedience importeth any difficultie, she may for her excuse gently propound the same', explained Cleaver, 'yet upon condition to obey'. However, Cleaver accepted there were limits to obedience, and that the good woman ought not to obey anything 'contrary to her honour, credit and saluation'.⁴⁷ Rachel Speght believed that 'if a wife fulfill the evill command of her husband, shee obeies him as a tempter'.⁴⁸ William Gouge told his female readers it was acceptable for a wife to ignore the orders of an ungodly husband if he ordered her to attend Mass or stage plays, play dice, sell short weights and measures, or behave like a whore.⁴⁹ Obedience to a husband therefore had to be set alongside obedience to God and the law.

Issues of authority also included the sensitive matter of how far a wife should be trusted and left to manage the domestic concerns generally seen as women's work. William Gouge argued there were 'many things in well governing a family more fit for one to meddle withal then for the other'. A husband was 'to meddle with the great and weightie affaires of the family' and his wife was 'to meddle with some lesse, but very needful matters, as nourishing and instructing children when they are young, adorning the house, ruling maid servants, with the like'. Although he insisted 'the husband may command his wife, but not she him', Gouge acknowledged wives to be 'mothers of the same children, whereof their husbands are fathers ... and mistresses of the same servants wherof they are masters ... and in many other respects there is a common equitie betwixt husbands and wiues: whence many wiues gather that in all things there ought to be a mutuall equalitie'. Nonetheless he insisted a wife had to submit to the authority of her husband even if he was 'a man of meane place', her

⁴⁷ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, pp.227.

⁴⁸ Speght, *Mouzell for Melastomus*, pp.17-18.

⁴⁹ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp.328-29.

former servant or a youth, 'for in giving her selfe to be his wife, and taking him to be her husband, she advanceth him above her selfe and subiecteth her selfe unto him'.⁵⁰

Conduct-book writers attempted to define the boundaries of female domestic authority, but also promoted the notion of wives as sources of counsel and assistance. 'Husbandry weepeth, where huswiferie sleepeth', claimed Thomas Tusser.⁵¹ Robert Cleaver described a good wife as a helper 'to helpe him in his labours, to helpe him in his troubles, to help him in his sicknesse' and 'a woman phisition, sometime with her strength, & sometime with her counsel'.⁵² William Gouge explained that 'when either husband or wife is fallen into any sinne, a mutuall dutie it is for the other, to use what redresse may be of that sinne: as if one of them were wounded, the other must take care for the healing of that wound', and that wives gave advice and counsel through 'meeke instructions, pithy perswasions, gentle reproofs ... and by the helpe of some good minister, or other discreet and faithfull friend'.⁵³ Thomas Hilder considered the wife to be a source of counsel 'given from Heaven', 'a singular and necessary Good', and a 'true Yoke-fellow'.⁵⁴ John Brinsley wrote that wives should remind husbands of their duties and faults 'with due observance, and respective acknowledgement of duty and subjection'.⁵⁵ Matthew Griffith informed husbands that a wife had 'both priviledge, and opportunity to reprove thee ... shee's commonly at thine elbow; and when she finds thee either speaking what is not comely, or doeing what is not seemely, she pluckes thee by the sleeve, and saith, Husband, remember thy selfe'.⁵⁶ Richard Chambers noted that 'domesticall dissensions are not always a curse though ever a crosse', whilst one jest compared women to 'dead bodies for Surgeons to work upon, because they tell a man his imperfections', suggesting that many wives offered

⁵⁰ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp.258-59, 271-72.

⁵¹ Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, p.67v.

⁵² Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.222.

⁵³ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, p.242.

⁵⁴ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, pp.24-25.

⁵⁵ J. Brinsley, *A Looking-Glasse for Good Women* (London, 1645), p.33.

⁵⁶ M. Griffith, *Bethel: Or, A Forme for Families* (London, 1633), pp.28-29.

blunt and critical advice which, even if unpalatable, might be helpful and necessary⁵⁷ Katherine Stubbes sought to persuade her husband Philip with 'wise counsel and by sage advice with all humilitie, and submission'.⁵⁸ Elizabeth Pepys certainly informed Samuel of his imperfections, such as when he kept the house awake by reading late in his chamber, but she was also a source of comfort and counsel for him, talking to and comforting Pepys when he lay in bed troubled and restless one morning.⁵⁹

To what extent wives could retain part of their own earnings or use household finances independently was an issue debated frequently. Wives were legally entitled to make contracts as agents or servants of their husbands, and if women used credit to purchase 'necessary' food, apparel, or lodgings it was assumed they had secured their husbands' consent. The Elizabethan Court of Chancery introduced the doctrine of the 'separate estate' of a wife that could be created through a pre-nuptial contract, or by conveying the property of a wife to her friends to hold in trust. Since medieval times London custom had allowed married women to trade as *femme sole* if they practised a different trade from their husbands. London wives were in an ambiguous position of being able to own their own property and practise their own trades, whilst remaining subject to legal and social constraints as married women. Due to the diversity of the metropolitan economy many wives perceived themselves as independent economic agents and acted as such.⁶⁰ Such practices contradicted conduct book advice which assumed husbands would control finances and allow their wives lump sums for use to some extent at their own discretion over extended periods. In poorer families tensions arose when housewives needed all their husbands' earnings for household necessities. If husbands chose to retain all or part of their earnings to spend on drink, gaming, or

⁵⁷ R. Chambers, *Sarahs Sepulture; Or A Funerall Sermon, preached for the Right Honourable and virtuous Lady Dorothe Countesse of Northumberland, at Petworth in Sussex* (London, 1620), p.8; A. Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet of Witty Jests, Rare Fancies and Pleasant Novels* (London, 1665), p.25.

⁵⁸ P. Stubbes, *A Christall Glasse for Christian Women* (London, 1612), p.5.

⁵⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 10 January 1662, iii, p.7; 5 March 1668, ix, p.102.

⁶⁰ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.159-60; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.49, Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.43, 45.

other women the ability of wives to keep hold of their own earnings became vitally important.⁶¹

Robert Wilkinson believed that a wife was 'in all things to endeavour her husbands profit'.⁶² Daniel Rogers believed that authority in financial matters should reside with the husband, and that for better or worse wives 'must be ruled by him that beares the purse'.⁶³ Robert Cleaver believed the good housewife ought to be 'wise, carefull, discret, and good forecasting of that, which God in mercie hath inabled and inriched them with, to see everything well ordered, and employed to a good end and use'.⁶⁴ 'If thrift by that labour, be saved or got: then it is good huswiferie, els is it not' wrote Thomas Tusser, suggesting that housewives were to spend wisely what monies their husbands provided.⁶⁵ John Wing thought husbands should provide their wives with as much as they could afford and that wives should be 'satisfied with that which is fitt'.⁶⁶ Some women submitted willingly to the authority of their husbands in financial matters. Thomas Laret, an Islington carpenter, had a wife who was 'a very honest woman, and one that laboured and took great paines for her living, and oftentimes would put the money in his hand that she got about at good mens houses by scowring, and washing and such like laboures'.⁶⁷ By contrast Henry Mitchell, a dockland porter, delegated all domestic responsibilities to his wife Lucy, giving her twelve shillings a week for household things.⁶⁸

Economic cooperation supposedly enabled wives and husbands to watch over spendthrift spouses. Matthew Griffith advocated that husband and wife should have

⁶¹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.79; id, 'Gender, Conscience and Casuistry : Women and Conflicting Obligations in Early Modern England', in H. E. Braun & E. Vallance (eds.), *Contexts of Conscience in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp.125-27.

⁶² R. Wilkinson, *Merchant Royall* (London, 1613), Sig. Dv.

⁶³ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, p.85.

⁶⁴ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.68.

⁶⁵ Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, Sig. 69r; T. Tusser, 'The booke of Huswifery' in id. *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (London, 1614), Sig. 4v.

⁶⁶ J. Wing, *The Crowne Conjugal Or, The Spouse Royall* (Middelburgh, 1620), pp.137-39.

⁶⁷ L. Price, *Bloody Actions Performed* (London, 1653), pp.9-10.

⁶⁸ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.72.

‘one purse’ in case a wife ‘turns spinning ... into spending; and instead of sitting at her wheele, makes all runne upon wheelles’.⁶⁹ Thomas Hilder advised the wives of dissolute husbands to be frugal, but would not allow women to put aside money for their own use since this undermined patriarchal authority.⁷⁰ However, William Gouge recalled the women of Blackfriars challenging his insistence that they had to gain consent from their husbands before disposing of household goods, and he was compelled to modify his position, claiming such restrictions did not apply to things ‘set apart for the use of the family, nor to extraordinary cases, nor always to an expresse consent, nor to the consent of such husbands as are impotent, or farre and long distant’. The provident, diligent wife helped provision the household with ‘such a sufficiencie of the goods of this world, as are needful for that estate wherein God hath set them’, having been assigned ‘a portion of those goods, as are meet for her place and charge’. Concern for household property was a duty for both spouses, and Gouge condemned the wife who ‘secretly hoardeth up whatsoever she can get, either by her owne industry, or else by purloining from her husband’.⁷¹ Other writers adopted more liberal attitudes regarding the rights of wives to act as independent economic agents. Surprisingly Joseph Swetnam accepted that ‘a painfull and a carefull woman, which knoweth when to spend and when to spare and to keepe the house in good order’, ought not to be denied ‘any necessary thing belonging to the house’.⁷² William Crompton argued that women should be allowed to enjoy the fruits of their labours.⁷³ Susanna Jesserson defined a good wife as a woman whose husband ‘dares trust her with his cash without an exact account’.⁷⁴ The author of *The Confession of the New Married Couple* suggested that since housekeeping was the

⁶⁹ Griffith, *Bethel*, p.285.

⁷⁰ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, p.112.

⁷¹ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, Sig. ¶3v-¶4r, pp.253-55.

⁷² Swetnam, *Araignment*, p.56.

⁷³ Crompton, *Lasting Jewell*, p.10.

⁷⁴ Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors*, p.6.

duty of the wife, it was 'against all reason, that she, like a servant, should give an account to her husband, what, wherefore or how' money was laid out.⁷⁵

In practice the trust accorded to wives in financial matters varied enormously. Samuel Pepys was keen to keep a close eye on Elizabeth's household accounts and would confront her if he discovered anything amiss.⁷⁶ In 1662 George Layman, a Whitechapel gardener, was bound over to answer a complaint by his wife, Ellen, that he constantly beat her although she was 'a laborious woman endeavouring to maintain herself, and to live as a wife ought, and should with her husband'.⁷⁷ Evidently Ellen assumed that a good wife at her social level was supposed to be able to support herself financially rather than rely on her husband to maintain her. Women were expected to contribute all that they could to keep the household going, but when money was tight and trust was lacking there could be tragic consequences. Mary Watson, the wife of Thomas Watson, a weaver, lived in Southwark and was 'an Industrious and Laborious Woman' who sold her husband's produce and that of other traders. But Thomas suspected Mary was embezzling money and began to spy on her. One day she went to a pawnbroker's and pawned two pieces of crape 'to supply her present Necessity'. Mary claimed she had intended to redeem them, but Thomas did not believe her and abused her in the street before murdering her.⁷⁸

Although extreme, such an incident shows that domestic relations could be anything but peaceful. Conduct books advised wives to remonstrate with bad husbands but did not condone active resistance. Robert Cleaver suggested somewhat naively that idle, cruel husbands who haunted alehouses and taverns should be

⁷⁵ A. Marsh, *The Confession of the New Married Couple, Being the Second Part of the Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (London, 1683), p.68.

⁷⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 28 February 1665, vi, pp.46-47; 14 May 1666, vii, p.125.

⁷⁷ LMA MJ/SR 1258/219. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for this reference.

⁷⁸ *A Sad and True Relation Of A most Barbarous and Bloody Murder Committed by One Thomas Watson, a Weaver, Upon The Body of Mary Watson, his Wife, Being Great with Child, and near her Delivery, In Peter's-Street, in the Parish of St. George's, Southwark, on Thursday the 16th of Decemb. 1686* (London, 1686), pp.4-5.

encouraged to stay at home with 'tolleration, gentle exhortation, and chearfull and louing entertainment'.⁷⁹ Thomas Gataker argued that a wife should encourage her husband to fulfil his obligations by doing the domestic duties expected of her.⁸⁰ William Gouge believed that even if a husband was 'of lewd and beastly conditions' and 'a drunkard, a glutton, a profane swaggerer an impious swearer, and blasphemmer', his wife was nonetheless to 'account him her superior and worthy of an husbands honour'.⁸¹ William Crompton suggested that if a wife requested something of her husband she was to do so with humility. 'If she complaine, it is with teares; if she chide it is with smiles', he advised.⁸²

Such advice was often difficult for women to follow, and even when it was offered husbands might not listen to it. 'Some men with wanton harlots leads their Life, and flights the kind embraces of a wife', complained a godly ballad.⁸³ *The Good Womans Champion* contained a dialogue in which a troubled wife pleaded with her husband to hear her complaints, telling him 'good counsel ne're is out of date', and that her heart would break if she did not disclose her 'carefull thoughts' to him. The response was blunt and sarcastic: 'if you will needs turne Counsellor, then at the Bar go plead, I do not like this Lecture well'. The wife persisted, telling her husband that 'all provision is grown dear'. 'All do complaine the world is bad, that helps to make it so', replied her spouse, telling his wife that what grieved him most was the excise placed on ale and beer. When the wife pleaded that 'provision must be had if we a house will keep', the husband told her to buy on credit. 'Good husband take another course for this is not the way', his wife begged, 'our creditors will have their due and you in prison lay'. 'Thou lovest for to prate', complained the husband, 'go wash your dishes or go spin, and do not talk to me'. His wife responded that if he continued with

⁷⁹ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.187.

⁸⁰ Gataker, *Marriage Duties*, p.6.

⁸¹ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, p.273.

⁸² Crompton, *Wedding Ring*, p.6.

⁸³ 'The Bloody-minded Husband', *Pepys ii*, p.169.

this lifestyle she would have neither ‘a dish to wash, or any other thing that will hold flesh, or fish’. ‘I may take my wheele and spin, but you I’m sure will reele’, she sighed, realising that no matter how hard she worked she would be unable to reform her husband and keep him from the alehouse. Her husband confirmed her suspicions, telling her that ‘the breath you spend it is in vaine, go prate unto the wall’. The text concluded with the wife lamenting her words being treated as wind and her counsel disdained, adding that if her husband continued to consume and spend with such profligacy the family would ‘famish, starve and dye’. Whilst the author did not side explicitly with the downtrodden wife, the title of the work and the fact that the final word was given from a female perspective leaves it in little doubt where the reader’s sympathies were expected to lie.⁸⁴ *A Scourge for Poor Robin* depicted a similarly unhappy scene in which a wife had to send her children to bed without supper and sat ‘over a piece of mouldy Bread, and a drought of Rot-gut’ until her dissolute husband returned from the alehouse and beat her. The author highlighted a double standard with regard to financial prudence and enquired why a wife should obey a husband who ‘reads Lectures to us of Good-houswifery, and after he has fool’d away several Guineys abroad ... comes home, and complains of the destruction of a Candles end, for want of a Save-all, and rails at his Wives Improvidence, for not managing more thriftily the Income of the Kitching-stuff-pot’.⁸⁵

Women responded to bad husbandry of this nature by pleading, scolding, seeking divorces or separations, fleeing the marital household, and even, though very rarely, murdering the errant male.⁸⁶ Balladeers hoped that good wives would support and try to reform their husbands. *Jack Had-Lands Lamentation* told of a wastrel who would return home drunk from the alehouse, to be begged by his wife with ‘loving

⁸⁴ I. A., *Good Womans Champion*, pp.10-14.

⁸⁵ *A Scourge For Poor Robin; Or, The Exact Picture of a Bad Husband* (London, 1678), pp.7-8.

⁸⁶ For a discussion of possible responses see Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.88-92, 114-26.

care' to repent. Jack was arrested for debt and placed in gaol because he could not raise bail, but his wife did not desert him. 'She made a friend and got me out', explained Jack, recalling how his wife had sold her wedding ring to pay for his release and took him home, chastened and penitent, where he never drank again. In *A Caveat for Young Men*, the wife entreats her husband to stay away from the alehouse and asks 'what woman her tongue can hold, when a man swallows all down his throat'? She sits at home with the children whilst her husband fills his guts with tobacco, beer, and wine, and argues that if he saved half the money he spent in the alehouse the family could afford to subsist and pay the rent. The husband repents in old age and warns young husbands to be ruled by their wives. Similarly *The Carefull Wife's good Counsel* depicts a wife advising her husband to 'save something for a rainy day'.⁸⁷ One jest told of a woman 'hard at her spinning' who castigated her husband when he staggered home drunk.⁸⁸ In some cases women clearly came to feel utter contempt for a wastrel husband who refused to amend. One jest centred on 'a Frantick fellow' who stayed late at the alehouse. When he arrived home he refused to go to bed, and lay on the floor, saying the house was his own and he would lie where he wished. One night he came in and sat by the fire until he fell asleep, but tumbled out of his chair and fell into the flames. The maid cried out that her master had fallen into the fire, to which her mistress replied 'let him alone, the house is his own, so long as he pays rent for it, he may lie where he pleases'.⁸⁹

In particularly bad situations even clerical authors realised that women might be unable to reform their husbands, and that they would have to shift for themselves. Daniel Rogers accepted that the wife would run a household if her husband was

⁸⁷ 'Jack Had-Lands Lamentation', *Pepys* ii, p.93; 'A Caveat for Young Men. Or, The Bad Husband turn'd Thrifty', *Pepys* ii, p.22; 'The Carefull Wife's Good Counsel: Or The Husband's firm Resolution to Reform his Life, and to lay up something against a Rainy Day', *Pepys* ii, p.73.

⁸⁸ Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.6.

⁸⁹ *London Jests: or A Collection of the Choicest Joques and Repartees, Out of the Most Celebrated Authors Ancient and Modern. With an Addition of above One Hundred Never before Printed* (London, 1685), p.162.

absent, or incapacitated by old age or infirmity.⁹⁰ Robert Cleaver believed that a woman could use her industry and wisdom to maintain a household, and that ‘though her husband should bee much wanting in his dutie, yet shee might holde in the goale’.⁹¹ Wives of sailors, carriers, drovers, and chapmen, and women whose husbands had left them temporarily to seek work had to learn to manage to the best of their abilities.⁹² In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Daniel Defoe, amongst other advice writers, advocated that women should take an active interest in the business dealings of their husbands so that they could cope if widowed, or in an emergency.⁹³ The author of *The Confession of the New Married Couple* suggested that the wives of shopkeepers might be of assistance to their husbands by learning to understand the business and conversing politely with the customers, providing them with helpful advice and pleasing answers to their questions. Ultimately the wife might even ‘attain to as perfect a knowledge of the Trading’ as the husband himself, which the author believed would be of great assistance if the woman was widowed, since she could retain possession of a trade that she could manage herself ‘and set forward with reputation’.⁹⁴ Matthew Griffith deemed it a fault and a crime for husbands not to provide for their wives, noting ‘how little commoditie in these days many wives receive from their wretched wicked husbands’, and believed that many wives might have ‘to shift for their own lives, and the lives of their families’, perhaps taking ‘such courses as will hazard their soules’.⁹⁵

Griffith did not specify what measures women with bad husbands might need to take, but cheap print and drama offer some clues. *Bloody News from Clerkenwell* told of the wife of a cooper who attempted to love and bear with the behaviour of her

⁹⁰ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, pp.268-71.

⁹¹ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.87.

⁹² Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.38-41.

⁹³ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.161-62.

⁹⁴ Marsh, *Confession*, pp.12-13, 18-19.

⁹⁵ Griffith, *Bethel*, p.293.

unkind husband. When he disappeared for several days she and her two children were ‘forced to make what shift they could for a Livelyhood, and compelled to sell some cloaths for a little money to buy them bread’.⁹⁶ In *The Roaring Girl* Goshawk claims it is ‘many a good woman’s fortune, when her husband turns bankrupt, to begin with pipes, and set up again’ and Laxton responds that ‘the raising up of the woman is the lifting up of the man’s head at all times. If one flourish, t’other will bud as fast’.⁹⁷ In 1655 Rachel Read wrote that she was planning to set up a sempster’s shop to rescue the family financially because her husband had many debts and trade was poor.⁹⁸

Whilst women might sometimes have to become involved in trade, husbands were castigated for meddling in their wives’ domestic concerns. Robert Cleaver warned that if a wife intervened in her husband’s affairs he was liable to be protective of his authority and reputation, whilst if a husband meddled in his wife’s business she might fear that he despised or mistrusted her.⁹⁹ Nonetheless this did not prevent the boundaries of spousal household duties from being crossed frequently. Daniel Rogers believed that ‘many foppish husbands doe so intermeddle in the Element, and about the peculiar entertainments of the women ... as if they must have an oare in each boate’. ‘What wise woman could endure a foole within doores’, he asked, ‘so full of passion, so talkative, so contentious with children and servants ... so hayle-fellow well met with his servants, fond and apish with his maydes, ready to traduce his wife in the hearing of strangers and the family, as if he put no difference between times, persons or occasions’.¹⁰⁰ Joseph Swetnam argued that a husband deserved to be mocked ‘who having a wise and a sufficient wife to doe all the worke within doores which belongs for a woman to doe ... will set hennes abroad, season the pott, and

⁹⁶ *Bloody News from Clerkenwell* (London, n.d.), p.4.

⁹⁷ T. Dekker and T. Middleton, *The Roaring Girl Or Moll Cutpurse* (London, 1611), 3, 10-13 in J. Knowles (ed.) *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.239.

⁹⁸ BL Add MS 21423, fo. 63. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for this reference.

⁹⁹ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.186.

¹⁰⁰ Rogers, *Matrimonial Honour*, pp.198, 215.

dresse the meate, or any the like worke which belongeth not to the man'.¹⁰¹ In *The Roaring Girl* Mistress Gallipot says she cannot abide 'apron husbands'.¹⁰²

Cheap print suggested some of the problems that might be caused when men interfered in housework. *The Woman to the Plow, and the Man to the Hen-roost* described a world inverted when husband and wife decide to swap work roles. As soon as the man puts on the apron he is mocked as a 'handsome slut' by his neighbours and disaster follows: the bread is burnt 'as black as a stock', the cow knocks over a full milk pail and kicks the husband in the face, and when making butter he forgets to include cream. 'Hose-and-doublet Huswifery' is condemned, though it is suggested that husbands should try women's work so they can learn how difficult it is and not chide their wives.¹⁰³ *London Jests* described a merchant who discovers that his wife 'always put the best part of his Allowance in her own pocket' when he sends her to market. He decides to go to the butcher's himself, and brings home a sheep's head that he carries by the horns. The story suggests that husbands who are forced to do the work of their wives will not only prove incompetent, but allow themselves to be cuckolded.¹⁰⁴

In summary, an ideal housewife was a woman who married in her mid-twenties to a man no more than ten years older than herself, and who remained his companion for the rest of her life. Being a housewife was a role that changed over the life-course and which required constant adaptation and flexibility by husband and wife on a daily basis. This involved a wife judging when it was appropriate to obey her husband, and when to exercise her right and duty to offer advice and counsel. In order to ensure a stable household couples needed to define their separate duties and trust each other to do everything in their individual power to profit the domestic

¹⁰¹ Swetnam, *Araignment*, p.56.

¹⁰² Dekker and Middleton, *Roaring Girl*, 6, 31-32, p.261.

¹⁰³ 'The Woman to the Plow, And the Man to the hen-Roost; Or, a fine way to cure a Cot-Queen', *Roxburghe* vii, pp.185-87.

¹⁰⁴ *London Jests*, pp.24.

economy. If husbands failed to uphold their part of the contract women were first to voice their concerns in a respectful manner. But if a husband was clearly incapable of keeping the household ship afloat the wife had the right, in exceptional circumstances, to assume primary responsibility for financial management of the household.

Domestic duties

The duties of housewifery were wide-ranging. *The Good Womans Champion* described a household of 'sweet society and company' in which a virtuous wife would help her husband with 'all affai[r]es, being carefull of her family, keeping him neat and decent both in woollen, linen, and other necessities, cleanly in dressing his dyet, and a loving nurse to him both in sicknesse and health'.¹⁰⁵ Thomas Tusser believed 'huswifery labours' were 'equall in paines' to those of husbandry and that whilst the weather might offer respite for husbandmen the housewife's affairs were never ending.¹⁰⁶ Daniel Rogers considered married life to be 'a rolling up and downe from one carnell business to another ... buying in, paying out, stocking the groundes, raising of commodity thereupon, going out and in, and walking in a round of the world; nothing but scuffling and scraping to get and scrape'. Rogers told husbands not to make their wives perform tasks exceeding their abilities, and to provide them with a servant if housewifery became too demanding.¹⁰⁷ Robert Cleaver believed a good housewife involved 'wise, carefull, discret and good forecasting of that, which God in mercie hath inriched them with, to see every thing well ordered, and imployed to a good end and use'.¹⁰⁸ William Crompton wrote of the housewife rising whilst it was still dark, and claimed that 'dilligence expels drowsinesse'.¹⁰⁹ Susan Jesserson

¹⁰⁵ I. A., *The Good Womans Champion*, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, p.68.

¹⁰⁷ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, pp.138-39, 247-48.

¹⁰⁸ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, pp.68-69.

¹⁰⁹ Crompton, *Wedding Ring*, p.3.

noted that a good wife 'knows no necessity for a breakfast in her bed, and can get up without being roused by the Trenchers ratling to dinner'.¹¹⁰

Ballads frequently emphasised the difficulties of married life for women. *The Countrey Lasses Good Counsel to All her Fellow-maids* contrasted the joys of a single life, when a maid could 'live gallantly' and buy 'fine Cloathes', with the 'trouble and care' of marriage, claiming that housewifery involved pinching, saving, and working day and night 'with a world of pain' to maintain a family. Another song depicted the housewife rising 'as soon as day breaks in the skies' and making a fire before starting carding, spinning, and sweeping.¹¹¹ In *The Shoemaker's Holiday* Simon Eyre tells Jane she must spin, card, and work for her living.¹¹² Jests and ballads depicted wives and husbands quarrelling over who worked hardest. *Poor Robins Jests* described a husband complaining of his burdensome life. His 'Trading Wife' told him not to be troubled, 'for you know that I bear more Burden than you every day, and yet I am contented'.¹¹³ *A Merry Dialogue betwixt a married man and his wife concerning the affaires of this carefull life* depicted a wife telling her husband how dependent men were on their wives:

You men could not tell how to shift,
If you of women were bereft
We wash your cloths, and dresse your diet
And all to keep your minds in quiet
Our workes not done at morne nor night,
To pleasure men is our delight.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors*, p.6.

¹¹¹ 'The Country Lasses Good Counsel to all her Fellow-maids', *Pepys* iii, p.20; 'A Merry Dialogue betwixt a married man and his wife concerning the affaires of this carefull life', *Pepys* i, p.389.

¹¹² T. Dekker, *Shoemaker's Holiday or The Gentle Craft* (London, 1600), 1, 207-10 in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.8.

¹¹³ *Poor Robin's Jests*, p.147.

¹¹⁴ 'A Merry Dialogue betwixt a married man and his wife concerning the affaires of this carefull life', *Pepys* i, p.389.

Many ballad heroines were depicted as hard-working and eager to please their suitors and husbands. The heroine of *Ione is as good as my Lady* made a bridal cake decked with plums, baked, brewed, spun, carded, sewed, knitted, dressed meat and fish and kept the house and yard clean. *Coridons commendation in the praise of his loue the faire Phillis* described a housewife who wasted nothing, was an excellent brewer and baker who made cake for her neighbours, and could milk a cow, teach a calf to suck and 'set a brooded duck'. *The Happy Husbandman* praised the heroine, Mary, for her work in the dairy, her spinning, and for providing her husband with 'cream and kisses' and 'the Joys of Night' when he came home from 'howing and mowing' in the fields. *The Dairy Maid's Tragedy* told of a maid who fed her lover syllabubs and custards and creams, mended his hose, cleaned his shoes and starched his bands.¹¹⁵

The Good Womans Champion included a list of items that a housewife would have to provide for her family, consisting of food, candles soap, coal, hose and shoes for the children, shirts, smocks, napkins, towels, and sheets.¹¹⁶ Robert Wilkinson noted that one of the principal duties assigned to a housewife was 'the feeding of the household', and complained that some extravagant women provided their households with exotic foods instead of 'base and homely' produce. 'Wee must have bread from one Countrie, and drinke from another, and we must have meat from Spaine, and sauce out of Italie', he complained.¹¹⁷ Similarly Gervase Markham believed the cooking of the housewife should be 'wholesome and cleanly, prepared at due houres, and Cookt with care and diligence ... rather to satisfie nature than our affections, and apter to kill hunger than revive new appetites'. Food was to come from 'the provision of her owne yard', not 'the furniture of the Markets'. Markham favoured the

¹¹⁵ 'Ione is as good as my Lady', *Pepys* i, p.236; 'Coridons commendation in the praise of his loue the faire Phillis', *Pepys* i, p.331; 'The Happy Husbandman: Or, Country Innocence', *Pepys* iii, p.45; 'The Dairy Maid's Tragedy', *Pepys* iii, p.320.

¹¹⁶ I. A, *The Good Womans Champion*, p.11.

¹¹⁷ Wilkinson, *Merchant Royall*, Sig. E2r, E3r-v.

housewife's food rather 'for the familiar acquaintance she hath with it, than for the strangenesse and rarity it bringeth from other Countries', and highlighted various skills and forms of knowledge that the housewife ought to possess regarding herbs, dressing and ordering meat 'in good and wholesome manner', setting out dishes by precedence according to fashion and custom, 'the election, preserving and curing of all sorts of Wines', and making malt 'both for the necessary and continuall use thereof, as also for the generall profit which accrueth and ariseth'. 'Provision of Bread and Drinke' in the correct portions and compositions was central to good housewifery, especially drink, which was considered 'the substance of all entertainment'. Efficient housewives were expected to produce three hogsheads of beer from one quarter of malt. For the good housewife to work well she was to be clean 'in body and garments' and have 'a quicke eye, a curious nose, a perfect taste, and ready care'. She was not to be 'butter-fingred, sweet-toothed, nor faint-hearted', and should possess 'perfect skill and knowledge in Cookery, together with all the secrets belonging to the same'. Women lacking such knowledge did 'by the Lawes of strict Justice challenge the freedome of marriage' because they could not 'cherish, serve, and keepe' their husbands.¹¹⁸

Daniel Rogers described the good wife dressing and providing her husband with 'savoury meate, such as his heart loveth'. Her duty was to 'diswade him from what is hurtfull, present what is wholesome, and that not in seeming curiosity, but in a reall and cordiall carefulnesse'. She was 'his welcomer to entertaine him, from his wet and cold journies, with warmth, with harbour, with comforts and refreshings'.¹¹⁹ Thomas Hilder wrote that the good wife was to ensure the household had sufficient good quality food and that 'nothing spoyled for want of seasonable spending'. She

¹¹⁸ G. Markham, *The English House-Wife* (London, 1637), pp.4, 62-65, 137, 155, 207, 243-44. On the importance of household brewing see J. M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford, 1996), esp. pp.34-35, 40-42.

¹¹⁹ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, p.298.

was to discourage her husband from 'profuse, unthrifty and expensive ways' by providing 'all necessary and wholesome dyet' and a quiet and hospitable domestic environment for her husband so he would not be tempted to venture abroad to the alehouse.¹²⁰ Susanna Jesserson praised industry and frugality, describing how the good wife 'provides liberally for her family, but has an eye that nothing be wasted, and remember that an ill manag'd Kitchin has destroyed many a noble Hall'.¹²¹

Samuel Pepys often praised his wife for the food she prepared, at least on the page. At the start of the diary Pepys recorded dining at home in the garret 'where my wife dressed the remains of a turkey'. A few weeks later Samuel returned home to find Elizabeth had prepared 'a fine dinner' of marrowbones, mutton, veal, 'a dish of fowl', 'a great tart', neat tongue, anchovies, prawns and cheese. Samuel also praised his wife for making 'Marmalett of Quince, which she now doth very well herself'. Elizabeth appears to have spent much of her time preparing food, even finding time to make pies despite a hectic day darting around London. She spent most of one Boxing Day making Christmas pies, and one Christmas Day stayed awake until four in the morning 'seeing her maids make mince-pies'.¹²²

Despite such efforts Samuel was not always pleased with the food Elizabeth produced. Pepys described her making 'pyes and tarts to try her oven with ... but not knowing the nature of it did heat it too hot and so did a little overbake her things'. He complained about 'the blackness of the meat as it came out of the Pott' and Elizabeth also bore the brunt of Samuel's displeasure when he arrived home one day to find dinner 'late and not very good ... only of a rabbit not half-roasted'.¹²³ However, like many Londoners Elizabeth did not always cook. Ovens were expensive to purchase and maintain, and as London was well served by (mostly male) bakers who baked

¹²⁰ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, pp.109-11.

¹²¹ Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors*, pp.5-6.

¹²² Pepys, *Diary*, 1 January 1660; 26 January 1660, i, p.3, 29; 4 November 1663, iv, p.363; 2 September 1661, ii, p.170; 26 December 1662, iii, p.293; 25 December, 1666, vii, p.420.

¹²³ Pepys, *Diary*, 13 November 1660, i, p.291; 22 December 1661, ii, p.237; 31 January 1663, iv, p.29.

three times daily and delivered to the door many people would have bought cheap baked goods or paid for the use of an oven in a bakery. Alternatively some poorer communities shared communal ovens.¹²⁴ Samuel and Elizabeth also ate in the inns, taverns, alehouses and victualling houses in and around London. Returning from Shoreditch one day Samuel and Elizabeth ‘called at a little alehouse and had an eele-pie’, the leftovers of which Elizabeth brought home, and on another occasion they stopped at a tavern in Hackney to eat and drink with Margaret Pen and Mary Mercer.¹²⁵ Although Samuel and Elizabeth were atypical early modern diners, London life forced and enabled many people to obtain food outside their own households. Whilst Londoners expected housewives to be good cooks, the practices of everyday life meant women did not have to fulfil this part of their role as often as in the provinces.¹²⁶

Pepys appears to have had mixed opinions about the culinary abilities of other women. On visiting Mr Pierce and his wife he found the food so raw he could not eat it, and described Mrs Pierce as a slut in his diary. Samuel deemed the nettle porridge served by William Symons’s wife more to his taste and considered it ‘very good’. He also praised Mrs Becke for the goodness of her food and the manner in which it was dressed. Pepys also praised his own maidservants when they served good food. He commented favourably on ‘a good shoulder of veal, well dressed by Jane and handsomely served to table’, and on another occasion described his dinner being ‘great and most neatly dressed by our own only maid’.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp.183-85; Earle, *English Middle Class*, p.297.

¹²⁵ Pepys, *Diary*, 10 May 1666; 25 June 1666, vii, pp.121, 182.

¹²⁶ On the London victualling trade see S. Pennell, “‘Great quantities of gooseberry pie and baked clod of beef’: victualling and eating out in early modern London’ in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), pp.228-49.

¹²⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 1 January 1661; 20 February 1661, ii, pp.3, 43; 29 April 1663, iv, p.114; 30 March 1662, iii, p.54; 4 April 1663, iv, p.95.

Pepys was of course not the only man to praise women for their cookery skills. In *A Trick to Catch the Old One* Lucre tells his wife to 'express thy housewifery; thou'rt a fine cook, I know't; thy first husband married thee out of an alderman's kitchen.'¹²⁸ In *Poor Robins Jests* a gentleman invited friends to dinner and his wife provided 'such chear as was seasonable' by feeding them collops and eggs, followed by puddings, for which the guests commended their hostess.¹²⁹ *Mans Felicity and Misery* described a wife providing her husband with food that was so good he ate it even when he was not hungry, and *Joan's Loving Letter* depicted a woman seeking to persuade her lover Roger to marry her by promising to feed him sillabub, chicken, and custards with cheesecakes and cream.¹³⁰ Cookery skills were therefore an important part of housewifery for which women won credit and received praise if they pleased their husbands and impressed their guests. Writers and husbands focussed on the ability of a wife to achieve good results with limited expense, for example by growing her own fruit and vegetables, and using seasonable and inexpensive ingredients.

Housewives were also primarily responsible for the household's health. Sir Robert Filmer declared that 'Physicke and Chirugery' would bring honour to women 'as Armes and Learninge do to men'.¹³¹ Gervase Markham believed that women should have 'a physicall kind of knowledge, how to administer many wholesome receits or medicines for the good of their healths, as well to prevent the first occasion of sicknesse', although he added that the 'depths and secrets of this most excellent Art of Physicke' were beyond the capabilities of even skilled women. A wife's skills should be limited to 'some ordinary rules and medicines which may availe for the benefit of her Family', and Markham suggested that housewives furnish themselves with 'very good Stils, for the distillation of all kinds of Waters ... and in them she

¹²⁸ Middleton, *Trick to Catch the Old One*, IV. ii. 73-75, p.179.

¹²⁹ *Poor Robin's Jests*, pp.17-18.

¹³⁰ 'Man's Felicity and Misery', *Pepys* i, p.393; 'Joan's Loving Letter, Containing her Invitation of lusty Roger', *Pepys* iii, p.230.

¹³¹ Filmer, 'In Praise of the Vertuous Wife' in Ezell, *Patriarch's Wife*, p.176.

shall distill all sorts of waters meete for the health of her Houshold'.¹³² Daniel Rogers wrote that the good wife knew her husband's body, 'to what ailes he is subject, his diseases, and distempers are known to her chiefly. ... If he be sicke, she is his best messenger to the physician, best & tenderest keeper under his Physick, best cook for kitchen Phisick at home, and must be the best instrument for recovery'.¹³³ Thomas Hilder told husbands that their wives would be true helpmeets 'in times of losse of health, and when thou lvest conflicting with greivous paines and burthensome (and perhaps loathsome) diseases' by getting help from physicians 'as hath both the Theory and practique part of their profession, and manifest most tendernesse, care and honesty for the good and recovery of their patients'.¹³⁴ Edward Reynolds described how Margaret Bewley was 'surpassing kind and loving to her husband, solicitous for his health, neglecting her own for to take care of his'.¹³⁵

The medical responsibilities of wives included preserving health as well as treating sickness. Bodily and household cleanliness were therefore important aspects of housewifery. Gervase Markham told wives to ensure that household members were clean and neat by providing woollen and linen clothes produced domestically.¹³⁶ Pepys's maidservant Sarah combed his head 'which I find so foul with powdering and other troubles', and washed his feet in a bath of herbs.¹³⁷ Household management texts stressed that women were responsible for the tidiness of kitchens and dairies, and for keeping pans, drinking vessels and bed linen clean.¹³⁸ Susan Jesserson noted that a good housewife abhorred 'sluttishness and slatternly tricks'.¹³⁹ 'Sluts corners

¹³² Markham, *The English House-Wife*, pp.4-5, 141.

¹³³ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, p.298.

¹³⁴ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, pp.26, 113.

¹³⁵ E. Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution for Christian Women* (London, 1659), p.4.

¹³⁶ Markham, *The English House-Wife*, p.167.

¹³⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 31 May 1662, iii, pp.96-97.

¹³⁸ K. Thomas, 'Cleanliness and godliness in early modern England' in A. Fletcher and P. Roberts (eds.), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson* (Cambridge, 1994), p.73.

¹³⁹ Jesserson, *Bargain for Bachelors*, p.6.

avoided, shall further thy helth', wrote Thomas Tusser.¹⁴⁰ Matthew Griffith believed a good wife should 'be carefull at home, that all things bee sweet, and cleane, that loathsomenesse drive him [her husband] not out of doores'.¹⁴¹ Households were to maintain a standard of cleanliness that would involve heavy and daily work on the part of both housewife and servants. Problems were exacerbated by a lack of piped water in most households and the necessity of emptying commodes and close-stools.¹⁴² When piped water became available in more wealthy households it saved women and servants many trips to the pump, well, or conduit, but also encouraged new, and higher, standards of domestic cleanliness.¹⁴³

Washing clothes was time-consuming and arduous. Samuel Pepys retired to bed after one o'clock one 'cold, frosty windy morning', leaving his wife and the maid 'washing still'. Another time he noted the maid rising at two in the morning to wash, and on a third occasion awoke at six o'clock to find Hannah had 'not gone to bed yet, but was making clean of the yard and kitchin'. One day he returned home to find his wife 'alone at work, and the house foul, it being washing day', a dispiriting image of domestic drudgery. Nonetheless Pepys expected certain standards. Samuel came 'to some angry words with my wife about neglecting the keeping of the house clean' and on another occasion he fell out with Elizabeth 'about the foulness of the linen of the table'. Samuel also castigated his maidservant, Hannah, 'for keeping the house no better, it being more dirty nowadays than ever it was when my whole family was together', whilst Elizabeth reprimanded the maids for not being diligent in rooting out fleas.¹⁴⁴ The fictional maid in *The Confession of the New Married Couple* gossiped

¹⁴⁰ Tusser, 'booke of Huswifery', Sig. 5v.

¹⁴¹ Griffith, *Bethel*, p.295.

¹⁴² See Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.222-23 for problems of cleaning houses and clothes.

¹⁴³ M. S. R. Jenner, 'From conduit community to commercial network? Water in London, 1500-1725' in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), p.263.

¹⁴⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 16 January 1660; 12 March 1660, i, pp.19, 85; 2 March 1663; 2 May 1663; 29 July 1663; 5 August 1663, iv, pp.65, 121, 253, 264; 27 December 1668, ix, p.402; 3 September 1664, v, p.260.

with the other maids of the neighbourhood whilst sweeping the street outside her master's shop, and complained 'what a horrible quantity of things she hath to scour and wash' before the arrival of her mistress's bridesmaids.¹⁴⁵

Maintaining specific standards of household cleanliness was thus very important to many women. In *A Common-Wealth of Women* Du Pier describes 'washing and starching' as 'honourable employments'.¹⁴⁶ The author of *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* wrote that before a gossips' feast the duty of the nurse was to put 'all things up in neat order against the coming of the sharp-sighted guests'. 'Their eyes will fly into every nook and corner', warned the author. '[They] will be peeping into every crevice and cranny: and because they will do it forsooth, according to the fashion, they make a shew as if they must go to the necessary chamber ... only to take an inspection whether it be as cleanly there as it is upon the Gossiping Chamber where all the Guests are. And t'is a wonder if they do not look into the seat, to see whether there be no Spyders webs spun in it'.¹⁴⁷

Garthine Walker has suggested that conflicts between women were often motivated by female competitiveness regarding household tasks and authority.¹⁴⁸ Eleanor Meade denied that she had ever said that John Hale's wife was not worthy to wipe her floors, suggesting the lowliness of such work, but also that cleanliness and housework were one of the main criteria by which women could compare and evaluate themselves and each other.¹⁴⁹ When Martha Ashlock was accused of clipping money, she summoned witnesses to testify that she got her living by washing, highlighting how a woman's work was linked to her respectability.¹⁵⁰ Cleaning and washing were hard work, and women took pride in maintaining high

¹⁴⁵ Marsh, *Confession*, p.64.

¹⁴⁶ T. D'Urfey, *A Common-Wealth of Women* (London, 1686), p.37.

¹⁴⁷ A. Marsh, *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage, Relating All the delights and contentments that are mask'd under the bands of Matrimony* (London, 1682), pp.150-51.

¹⁴⁸ Walker, *Crime*, p.98.

¹⁴⁹ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 33r.

¹⁵⁰ OBP, 23 February 1687, t16870223-27.

standards, sometimes reacting violently when their work was disrupted. Thomas Wilson claimed to have been beaten by the female servants he worked with when he spilt water on the shoes of one of the maids who was washing the entrance to the house.¹⁵¹ Margaret Betts of Westminster was said to have threatened to strike anyone around the face with her broom if she caught them sweeping dirt outside her door.¹⁵² By contrast Juliana Cluny failed to conform to expected standards, and was criticised for her 'sluttish penthouse'.¹⁵³

When Richard Baxter married Margaret Charlton he was critical of how much time she spent cleaning, describing it as 'a sinful curiosity, and expense of servants' time'. Baxter was aware that Margaret's standards were significantly higher than his own, but he admitted that she won praise from visitors for her cleanliness, illustrating that women might set high standards for themselves rather than for their husbands.¹⁵⁴ Other men showed greater awareness of the importance of women maintaining clean houses, and altered their own behaviour on laundry days. Nehemiah Wallington did not attend a fast one day because his wife was drying laundry.¹⁵⁵ Pepys described the disorder that ensued when his maid Sarah was ill one washing day. Samuel fell out with his wife when she 'appointed a wash' on a particular day, but he was aware of the importance of domestic cleanliness, and ordered one of his maidservants to wash the wainscot of the parlour one day, 'which she did very well'.¹⁵⁶ Some men escaped the domestic environment when their wives were in the midst of washing, and sought

¹⁵¹ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 20r.

¹⁵² M. Ingram, "'Scolding Women Cucked or Washed': A Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England?" in J. Kermode and G. Walker (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), p.71.

¹⁵³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.91.

¹⁵⁴ Cited in Thomas, 'Cleanliness and godliness', pp.66-67; cf. Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.62.

¹⁵⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.206.

¹⁵⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 25 March 1663, iv, p.85; 10 January 1664, v, p.10; 11 September 1660, i, p.243.

alternative hospitality. One song encouraged men to 'come, come away to the Tavern I say, for now at home 'tis washing day'.¹⁵⁷

Household furnishings were another important area of female responsibility and a further source of pride. However, there was disagreement over the actual level of decoration, and Robert Cleaver complained that 'many fooles, beginne first to decke their houses before they lay for necessities, and are faine afterwards to sell their ornaments with losse to provide many necessarie matters'. He warned wives not to 'purloyn and powle' from their husbands in order to 'pranke up ... her house and chambers in braverie'.¹⁵⁸ William Gouge castigated wives 'scorning to stoope, and to come downe to their husbands present condition', and who would not reduce their expenditure on 'rich furniture, and other like things, which are causes of great expence to their husbands'.¹⁵⁹ By contrast William Crompton believed 'the furniture of her house and table is the fruit of her hands' and deemed furnishings to be 'commendable Emblemes of pious industry' and 'most usefull things'.¹⁶⁰

What decorating entailed depended on the wealth of the individual, and it could involve significant expenditure amongst the metropolitan elites. Samuel Pepys recorded Elizabeth telling him she had bought a bed and furniture for her chamber.¹⁶¹ Lower down the social scale furnishings were not as lavish, but women nonetheless made concerted attempts to add some colour. The heroine of *Ione is as good as my Lady* decked the windows of her house with green bows, wreathes and tutties.¹⁶² When Pepys visited Mrs Palmer's house, 'that I might there have light upon some lady of pleasure', he found 'none nor anything that pleased me but a poor little house

¹⁵⁷ J. Hilton, *Catch that Catch Can: Or A Choice Collection of Catches, Rounds and Canons: Being Three or Foure Parts in One* (London, 1658), p.18. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for this reference.

¹⁵⁸ Cleaver, *Household Government*, pp.76, 89.

¹⁵⁹ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p.325.

¹⁶⁰ Crompton, *A Wedding Ring*, p.4.

¹⁶¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 2 October 1660, i, p.257.

¹⁶² 'Ione is as good as my Lady', *Pepys* i, p.236. A tutty was a nosegay, posy or bunch of flowers.

which she hath set out as fine as she can'.¹⁶³ Levinus Lemnius noted 'the neate claenlines, the exquisite finenesse, the pleasaunte and delghtfull furniture' in English homes, 'their chambers and parlours strawed over with sweet herbes ... their nosegays finely entermingled with sundry sortes of fragrannte floures in their bedchambers and privy roomes, with comfortable smell'.¹⁶⁴

In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* Allwit says his house is 'simply stocked with cloth-of-tissue cushions to furnish out bay-windows ... quaint and costly from the top to the bottom; Life, for furniture, we may lodge a countess!' Allwit feels this is ostentatious but his wife tells him 'there's that should be, sir; your nose must be in everything', suggesting he should not interfere in domestic matters.¹⁶⁵ In *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* a young wife goes with her aunt and sister to buy 'down beds, dainty Plush and quilted coverlets' and 'costly hangings'. She desired 'large Venetian Looking-glasses, Chinaware, Plush Chairs, Turkish Tapistry, Golden Leather, rich Pictures, a service of plate, a Sakerdan press, and Ebbony Table, a curious Cabinet and child-bed linnen cupboard, several Webs for Napkins and Tabel-cloaths, fine and course linen, Flanders laces, and a thousand other things' for the house, and when she and her maid went shopping their neighbour John 'must follow them softly with his wheel-barrow, that the things, which are bought, may be carefully and immediately brought home'. The author went on to describe how a woman's friends would act as 'prudent School Mistresses' to her, counselling and advising her 'to buy of the richest and newest mode, and what will be neatest, and where to be bought'.¹⁶⁶ In the sequel the author described how the wife purchased 'Table-cloaths, Napkins ... Coats, Sheets, Blankets, and all sorts of necessaries for housekeeping and habit'. However, the author also suggested that although when a woman first married she would focus

¹⁶³ Pepys, *Diary*, 4 August 1663, iv, pp.261-62.

¹⁶⁴ W. Harrison, *The Description of England* edited by G. Edelen (Ithaca NY, 1968), p.78.

¹⁶⁵ T. Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (London, 1613), 5:1, 160-66 in R. Dutton (ed.), *Women Beware Women and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.63.

¹⁶⁶ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, pp.39-40, 48-49.

her attentions on buying Venetian looking-glasses, Indian China, plush stools and chairs, and Turkish tapestries, after some time she would become more concerned with saving and sparing, taking care to waste nothing, and to throw nothing away negligently. His comments suggested that a good housewife ought to provide suitable comforts for the home, but also be aware of financial constraints.¹⁶⁷

Samuel Pepys reported Elizabeth coming home one evening 'having been abroad today to buy more furniture for her house'. Shortly over a month later Pepys bought two pictures for the house, but Elizabeth did not like one of them and he returned it at once. Samuel was sometimes unhappy with the money Elizabeth spent on furnishings, and was troubled when she laid out twelve pounds on 'household stuff' in a single day. On another occasion they fell out regarding some cushions that Elizabeth wrought with worsteds, and which Samuel considered to be 'too little for any use'. At other times Pepys allowed her free rein within the house and admired the results, noting how Elizabeth had 'furnished very neatly my study' and spent 'all day putting up her hangings in her closet; which she doth very prettily herself with her own hand'. Although Elizabeth did employ an upholsterer to help her make hangings for her bedchamber, she performed much of the work herself and Samuel was 'mightily pleased with what my poor wife hath been doing these eight or ten days with her own hands, like a drudge, in fitting the new hangings of our bed-chamber of blue, and putting the old ones into my dressing room'.¹⁶⁸

Housewifery was wide-ranging, time-consuming and physically laborious. To some extent such tasks were meant to ease the life of the patriarchal householder, but they were also clearly important to women themselves, who placed great value on being good cooks and creating and maintaining pleasant domestic environments.

¹⁶⁷ Marsh, *Confession*, pp.74, 145.

¹⁶⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 3 October 1660, i, p.258; 19 November 1660, i, p.296; 18 November 1662, iii, p.261; 11 June 1663, iv, p.180; 20 November 1662, iii, p.262; 5 October 1663, iv, p.324; 10 January 1666; 26 January 1666, vii, pp.10, 24.

Women competed to keep up with the standards of their neighbours, and could win respect, credit, and perhaps even envy, if they surpassed their peers in such matters. Food provision was slightly less important in a metropolitan environment than in the countryside, but cleanliness and the ability to furnish a house well were highly valued, visibly signifying female honour through displays of wealth, industry, and taste.

Matriarchal authority over servants

One of the primary responsibilities of housewives was to manage servants, especially maids. 'How do you like your maid?' was allegedly a common topic of conversation amongst women, according to one contemporary author.¹⁶⁹ Domestic service was the largest sector of the female employment market and one wherein many women were first employed. Many women came to London after the death of one or both parents, and even if the parents were still alive they often lived at some distance, enabling women to live freer, but more vulnerable lives than they would have in the provinces.¹⁷⁰ The age of servants varied, but many were in their teens or early twenties, and for girls and young women service was meant to be a safe haven before marriage, a means to acquire housewifery skills and a form of social control.¹⁷¹

As cleanliness and comfort became more important for the middling sorts the need for household assistance increased. In later seventeenth century London around eighty per cent of middling and artisan households employed one or two domestic servants, and four out of five of all domestic servants were female, many coming from outside the city and gaining work by word of mouth, or through agencies and brokers. Service conditions improved gradually over the period. Wages increased, jobs grew

¹⁶⁹ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, p.106.

¹⁷⁰ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.15.

¹⁷¹ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.96, 108.

more specialised, and servants developed an increased awareness of what was an appropriate workload. A growing number of servants needed to be employed to do the same quantity of work, creating more jobs. Most servants moved regularly, staying for less than three months, but others remained in the same household for years. Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys employed thirty-eight servants over the course of nine years, the longest period of service being for seven years in three distinct periods. Many servants were willing to negotiate their contracts and were concerned for their place in the domestic hierarchy. Minor employment details were important when the work was often both multifaceted and arduous. Life in domestic service was not easy. Employers expected their servants to be obedient, respectful, and in at least some households, pious. Maidservants were often sexually vulnerable, and could be reprimanded, beaten, or dismissed if caught stealing, gossiping, idling, or committing sexual misdemeanours. However, others were treated affectionately, and like their mistresses were praised either for their hard work or for particular domestic skills.¹⁷²

Domestic servants were mostly under the authority of the mistress rather than the master, and clerical authors wrote much about how housewives should behave toward their employees. Robert Cleaver stressed that a good mistress ‘must not let her maides have their owne waies for want of skill: but she must be able to direct and prescribe, what and how in every business’. Women lacking such skills were to acquire them so that they might better manage household subordinates. Mistresses were to treat servants ‘as their natures require’, and Cleaver warned that ‘chiding and brawling’ were not the most effective methods of domestic management. Mistresses were to be aware of ‘what servants may doe within the compasse of so much time and what is above their strength’, balancing compassion with discipline. She ‘must have a diligent eye to the behaviour of her servants, what meetings and greetings, what

¹⁷² Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.218-29; id, *City Full of People*, pp.123-30; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.132-35, 153-54.

tickings and toyings, and what words and countenances, there be between men and maides, least such matters being neglected, there follow wantonnesse, yea follie within their houses', but she also had to ensure their servants had 'their necessities, that they may go soone to their worke'. 'She suffereth none to be idle in her house, but either doing something that is profitable or else learning somewhat, that is meete for them', noted Cleaver. As well as observing servant interactions in and outside the household a good mistress was to be 'a stirrer in every place, to oversee whether dutie bee done of all hand, and that in good sort', and 'at an end of every great worke: sometimes setting to her hands to encourage the doer, sometimes gently teaching, sometimes commending, sometimes speaking faire, but never brawling: sometimes showing what is amisse, in gentle language'. She was to 'lay a diligent eye to her household-stuffe in every roome, that nothing be embezeled away, nothing spoyled or lost for want of looking to, nothing mard by ill-usage, nor nothing worne out by more using then is needefull, nothing out of place'. An appropriate distance needed to be maintained between servants and mistress. Servants were to treat their mistress with reverence and fear, and mistresses were not to be overly familiar with servants 'least they should be too bold to talke, to ieast, or unreverently and unmannerly to behave themselves'. An ideal mistress taught her maidservant to be 'carefull, faithfull, patient, neat, and pleasant ... cleanly, quicke and handsome, and of few words: honest in her word deed and attire: diligent in a household and [to] have some skill in washing, baking, brewing, sowing and spinning, but chiefly in holding her peace'.¹⁷³

William Crompton wrote that housewives should run their households 'like a well-ordered army' in which everyone their own particular employment.¹⁷⁴ William Gouge believed that a wife's presence in the home enabled 'many things to be espied, and so redressed, which otherwise might never have been found out', but that she was

¹⁷³ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, pp. 90-93, 376-77, 381.

¹⁷⁴ Crompton, *Wedding Ring*, p.4.

not solely responsible for domestic government and that husbands should aid wives with 'stubborne and stout' servants.¹⁷⁵ Thomas Tusser told housewives to inform their servants what labours they were to perform, but warned them not to show them 'what vittailles [were] in store'.¹⁷⁶ Thomas Hilder told mistresses to 'prevent servants idleness and wastefulness, for there were never worse servants in an Age than now; they must have great wages, but do little work for it'. Bad servants would 'filtch, pilfer, and steale, waste and consume', so mistresses should 'have a jealous eye upon such servants in whom there is the least ground of suspicion of unfaithfulnesse, to prevent their passages out of the back doore ... and to take heed of laying temptations on them, by letting them enjoy any opportunities to come at such things which concern them not to have to do with but at times of washings, or cleansing the corners of the house'.¹⁷⁷ William Crompton praised women more highly for work they did with their own hands than for ordering others to perform tasks.¹⁷⁸ Matthew Griffith advised housewives to copy the biblical example of Esther by giving servants physical and religious exercise and providing a positive role model by rising early to go about her work.¹⁷⁹

Several writers emphasised the importance of religious education. Gervase Markham believed religious education through household prayers 'and other exercises of Religion' ensured that servants behaved correctly and helped 'procure Gods favour more plentifully on all the houshold'.¹⁸⁰ John Brinsley wrote that housewives 'may and ought to teach and instruct their families, to Catechise children and servants, I and to perform other Family-duties with them, in case the husband be absent, or not able, or not willing to discharge them'.¹⁸¹ It is clear that some godly women followed these

¹⁷⁵ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, pp.259-60.

¹⁷⁶ Tusser, 'booke of Huswifery', p.6r.

¹⁷⁷ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, pp.90-91, 109-10.

¹⁷⁸ Crompton, *A Lasting Jewell*, p.10.

¹⁷⁹ Griffith, *Bethel*, pp.417-18.

¹⁸⁰ Markham, *English House-wife*, pp.2-3.

¹⁸¹ Brinsley, *A Looking-Glasse for Good Women*, p.33.

prescriptive ideals. Dorothy Hanbury was ‘a religious governor of her servants’, and set a good example by waking early on cold winter mornings and encouraging them to prayer.¹⁸² Elizabeth Hoyle summoned her servants three times on Sundays, once after dinner, once before supper and once after, and made them provide accounts of what they had heard in the sermons that day.¹⁸³ Mary Bewley complained that household duties required so much of her attention, but was a governess who ‘look’t well to the wayes of her house’ and whose ‘delight was to abide at home, not spending her time on needlesse and complemental visits’.¹⁸⁴ Ann Smith issued ‘mild commands’ to her servants.¹⁸⁵ Katherine Stubbes ‘would never suffer any disorder or abuse in her house to be either unreproved or unreformed’.¹⁸⁶ Good mistresses also sought to protect their female servants. Anna Carrington fell out with Hester Frost because Hester ‘did often intice forth of her doors’ one of Anna’s maids.¹⁸⁷ Mistresses with high religious standards were not respected universally of course, and they provided material for satirical pamphleteers. *Poor Robins True Character of a Scold* ridiculed a mistress ‘of the preciser Cast’ who ‘will not cudgel her Maid without a Text for’t’.¹⁸⁸

Elizabeth Pepys was not an exceptionally pious woman, but she demanded high standards and criticised her maids regularly. Unfortunately for the most part she was not especially skilled at managing her servants, being overly familiar with some, and too short-tempered with others. Elizabeth fell out with Doll because the girl would ‘always be talking in an angry manner ... without reason and to no purpose’. Within a few months she also confronted Nell, whom Pepys deemed to be ‘a simple

¹⁸² S. Ainsworth, *A Sermon preached at the funerall of that religious gentle-woman Mis Dorothy Hanbury* (London, 1645), p.29.

¹⁸³ J. Birchall, *The Non-Pareil, Or The Vertuous Daughter Surmounting All her Sisters* (York, 1614), pp.15-16.

¹⁸⁴ Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution*, p.6.

¹⁸⁵ M. Fowler, *Gods Esteem of the Death of his Saints* (London, 1656), pp.27-28.

¹⁸⁶ P. Stubbes, *A Christall Glasse for Christian Women* (London, 1592), p.4.

¹⁸⁷ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 74r.

¹⁸⁸ *Poor Robin’s True Character of a Scold: Or The Shrew’s Looking-glass* (London, 1678), p.5.

slut', and who he feared would become 'a cross grained wench'. Within a month Elizabeth was berating the same maid for laziness. Some maids did not react well to Elizabeth's management style. When Elizabeth gave Mary Ashwell a box on the ear for lying to her Ashwell struck her back. Pepys listened to Ashwell's complaints and decided she had received 'most base usage' from Elizabeth, 'which my wife sillily denies'. Elizabeth also fell out with her maid Sarah when she struck the girl, and Samuel had to make peace between maid and mistress. On one occasion Pepys criticised Elizabeth 'for not commanding her servants as she ought', striking her in anger so that her eye required a poultice to be laid upon it.¹⁸⁹ Whilst such behaviour was atypical of him, it reveals that issues of servant management could cause tensions to run high between spouses.

Shortly before Jane Birch left their service Samuel and Elizabeth argued about her dismissal; Pepys believed his wife 'much in fault' and thought Elizabeth favoured the boy Tom, which displeased him. On another occasion Samuel returned home one day to find that Elizabeth had struck her maid Barker because she had lied about why she had been abroad. On this occasion Samuel sided with his wife, having examined Barker and found her to be lying. However, Elizabeth was not utterly incompetent when dealing with her maids, and showed some awareness of their sensibilities. For example, one day she killed a turkey she had been given because she 'could not get her maid Jane by no means at any time to kill anything'.¹⁹⁰

The domestic responsibilities of mistresses towards their servants included providing appropriate gifts and small privileges. Servants received cash gifts at Christmas and New Year and payments in kind in the form of shoes and clothes. Kitchen staff often helped themselves to household provisions, and messengers

¹⁸⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 30 October 1661; 15 December 1661, ii, pp.204, 233; 12 January 1662, iii, p.8; 4 August 1663; 13 August 1663, iv, pp.262, 276; 3 November 1663, iv, p.363; 19 December 1664, v, p.349.

¹⁹⁰ Pepys, *Diary*, 31 January 1665, vi, p.26; 12 May 1667, viii, p.212; 4 February 1660, i, p.41.

bringing gifts or news sometimes received tips. Servants were to be provided with necessary medical care and to be allowed time for recreation away from the house. They might also receive gifts for long service or when marrying, and be granted bequests on the death of a master or mistress. Living or working together on a daily basis, mistresses and servants often became close. Mistresses might aid the marriage prospects of their servants by allowing young men to visit the household, and strong bonds sometimes developed between employers and employees that could continue after the latter left the household, and even until death.¹⁹¹

Thomas Hilder wrote that servants were to be provided with sufficient food and drink, and access to lodging, washing facilities and medical care, and suggested that diligent and faithful servants be treated liberally when they left service. Servants who were getting married might have a wedding dinner given in their honour and receive money or 'household-stuffe, which is a great advantage to them'.¹⁹² Widow Hollydaie bequeathed household items to her servant Jane in her will.¹⁹³ Elizabeth Pepys bought combs for her maids and helped Jane Birch dress her hair. One Twelfth Night Elizabeth arranged a party for all the servants. When Jane Birch left the Pepys household to marry, Samuel gave her fiancé, Tom, forty pounds, and twenty pounds to Jane. More significantly, Elizabeth gave Jane an additional twenty pounds so that both spouses would start their married lives on an equal financial footing. Elizabeth visited Jane the following week to help her sort her linen, showing how relationships between mistresses and servants develop into friendships.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.219-21; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.105; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.139-43.

¹⁹² Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, pp.154-58.

¹⁹³ V. Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations' in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. E. Wrightson (eds.), *The World we have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford, 1986), p.148.

¹⁹⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 23 January 1660, i. p.26; 2 September 1664, v, p.260; 6 January 1665, vi, pp.4-5; 19 April 1669, ix, p.526; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.142.

One of the most demanding problems facing a mistress was how to supervise and control her maids. Any sexual relations, whether voluntary or coerced, posed a serious threat to the good order and reputations of the household. Maidservants had to be protected from male servants, lodgers, apprentices, sons, or even the master of the household. Conduct literature frequently advised servants how to repel or escape the advances of their employers by threatening to or actually leaving their service. Women were advised to avoid entering employment with single men, though not all women chose or were able to do so. Some entered into informal 'marriages' with unmarried masters, by choice or coercion, whilst others were paid for allowing masters to use their bodies sexually, whilst the most unfortunate were physically forced into sexual liaisons by masters who considered maidservants to be their property. If mistresses discovered their maids had been involved in illicit sexual liaisons their primary concern was often to remove them from the household, sometimes, but not always providing them with help to start anew elsewhere. Less common were liaisons between mistresses and male servants, but when they did occur contemporaries considered them exceptionally damaging to household order.¹⁹⁵ Laura Gowing notes that 'clear lines drawn between masters and servants were in constant danger of infringement by the possibility ... of sexual relationships between masters and maids and mistresses and manservants'.¹⁹⁶

Many female servants lacked private spaces to flee to. Elizabethan servants slept in shared spaces (women tended to sleep in attics) whilst seventeenth-century personal servants slept on truckle beds at the foot of the bed of their master and/or mistress. Middling-sort maidservants often had their own rooms, but conditions were

¹⁹⁵ T. Meldrum, 'London Domestic Servants from depositional evidence, 1600-1750: servant-employer sexuality in the patriarchal household'. In Tim Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling poverty: the voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp.47-69; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.144-49, 158-61.

¹⁹⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.27.

very different in artisan households.¹⁹⁷ By the later seventeenth century many female servants were sharing single-sex sleeping quarters.¹⁹⁸ Sharing sleeping quarters might ensure that maids were protected from sexual predators. Asking why chambermaids were more troubled with greensickness than other maids, one jest gave the answer that it was because they lay at the foot of their master's beds.¹⁹⁹ By contrast Anna Redwood described how she slept in a trundle bed at the foot of her master's bed and alleged that he had raped her twice at Shrovetide when her mistress was visiting Lady Wentworth.²⁰⁰ Although Anna later confessed to having falsified the story it was clearly a familiar and plausible narrative. One jest told of a lawyer who returned home late when drunk and slept with his maidservant, each time giving her half a crown. Eventually his wife discovered their practice 'and went her self into the Maid's Bed'. Her husband came home and matters proceeded as usual. In the morning the wife called for the maid, paid her wages, and dismissed her. When the girl was in the street she called after he, handing over a crown to the maid in front of her husband and presumably a number of their neighbours as payment for her 'hard work', an action that shamed both the girl and the husband.²⁰¹

As well as preventing sexual liaisons mistresses were expected to know if their maidservants became pregnant. Ann Price stood trial for infanticide because her mistress noticed she was 'out of order' and had a midwife examine her. Similarly the mistress of Elizabeth Messenger noticed her maid was ill and sent for a midwife who confirmed that Elizabeth had given birth.²⁰² However, the attitudes of mistresses towards the bodies of their maidservants should not be perceived solely in negative terms. Although female servants were subjected to searches of both bodies and

¹⁹⁷ Earle, *City Full of People*, pp.125-26; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, p.107.

¹⁹⁸ T. Meldrum, 'Domestic service, privacy and the eighteenth-century household', *Urban History*, 26:1 (1999), pp.33-34.

¹⁹⁹ Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.89.

²⁰⁰ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 77v.

²⁰¹ *Poor Robin's Jests*, pp.147-48.

²⁰² OBP, 13 April 1681, t16810413-1; 20 May 1681, t16810520-3.

bedchambers, mistresses could sometimes be supportive and protective if they discovered a servant was pregnant.²⁰³ But for the most part it was women more than men whose attempts to regulate female bodies reinforced patriarchy, and it was wives and widows whose marital status gave them the necessary authority to make such intrusive enquiries. In return such women cemented their place in early modern communities, having discovered bastard-bearers who might have posed a threat to local moral order and economic stability. Informing on other women and the ability to identify pregnant women helped define boundaries between honest matriarchs and single unchaste whores. Such actions also proved that a woman had moved from being the observed to the observer.²⁰⁴

Another problem facing mistresses was petty theft by maidservants. Popular targets included cash, clothes and small household items that were easy to hide or sell, and where the absence would not be noticed.²⁰⁵ Joanna Buckley described how her servant Beatrice Bent had lived with her for over a year and behaved 'very rudely and lightly ... by using her self so much familyar' with the men of the house, 'leaping wantonly' around in their company. Joanna described Beatrice as false in word and deed, and claimed nothing had ever gone missing from the house before Beatrice arrived, giving an example of the untrustworthiness of her servant. When Beatrice returned from shopping one day, Joanna was suspicious about how much Beatrice had paid for the meat she had been asked to buy. Along with Goodwife Smith Joanna went to speak to the butcher and discovered the girl had lied to her about the cost.²⁰⁶

Such incidents occurred frequently. Margaret Hobson, Jane Pistoll, Alice Watkins and Katherine Rich were all brought before the Bridewell either for

²⁰³ L. Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticides in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 156 (1997), pp.92-93, 103-05.

²⁰⁴ L. Gowing, 'Ordering the body: illegitimacy and female authority in seventeenth-century England' in M. J. Braddick and J. Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: order, hierarchy and subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.47-51.

²⁰⁵ Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, pp.334-37; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.166-69.

²⁰⁶ GL MS 9056, fos. 83r-84r.

attempted, suspected or actual theft from their mistresses.²⁰⁷ If a servant gained the confidence of her mistress she might be trusted with the household keys. Jane Birch was trusted by the Pepyses, though they had to summon a locksmith to open a trunk one day when Jane was ‘gone forth with the keys’.²⁰⁸ By contrast when Alice Jones was accused of stealing a silk gown and silk petticoat her mistress reported that Alice ‘had the use of all her keys, and so had opportunity to take away the goods’.²⁰⁹ Anne Brannah stole the keys of her mistress one night, opened a chest and stole five pounds contained in a linen sack.²¹⁰ Some mistresses went to significant lengths to retrieve stolen goods. One gentlewoman from Wapping employed a thief-taker to pursue a female servant who had stolen a silver tankard and farrendon gown.²¹¹ She may have been motivated by a sense of betrayal as well as a natural desire to recover the goods.

The threats posed by servants were not only financial; they might also involve verbal and physical abuse.²¹² Elizabeth Holden was brought in for running away from her master and using ‘very bad speeches’ to her mistress.²¹³ *Horrid News from St Martins* told of an orphaned sixteen-year-old girl who was taken in by a widow and ‘another gentlewoman of good worth’, but poisoned them after being chided for a misdemeanour.²¹⁴ Some mistresses felt unable to cope with unruly servants and made others deal with them, such as Agnes Operson who brought Barbara Owen to the Bridewell for running away and pilfering.²¹⁵

But far more often servants were the victims of their mistresses.²¹⁶ Lady Thresham was ordered to restore to her servant Helen Haddock ‘diverse articles of

²⁰⁷ GL MS 33011/9, fos. 34, 41, 113, 128.

²⁰⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 8 January 1663, iv, p.8.

²⁰⁹ OBP, 11 July 1688, t16880711-17.

²¹⁰ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 55r.

²¹¹ OBP, 14 January 1676, t16760114-12.

²¹² For examples of the latter see Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.176.

²¹³ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 53v.

²¹⁴ *Horrid News From St. Martins: Or, Unheard of Murder and Poyson* (London, 1677), p.4.

²¹⁵ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 18v.

²¹⁶ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.135-37.

wearing apparel'. Helen was a servant whom Lady Thresham had retained for a year, but had then turned out of doors within a month without her wages or clothes. Lady Elizabeth Slingsby was brought before the sessions for violently beating her servant Mary Burliston 'with a great sticke' and threatening to strike her with a hammer, having refused to pay Mary her wages, and 'doth refuse her said servant her clothes'. Lady Elizabeth was ordered to pay the twenty-five shillings due to Mary for wages, to pay two shillings for silk Mary had bought 'for the use of her said Lady', and to deliver the 'cloathes and wearinge-apparell' to Mary that she had left in the house. Dorothy Priest, a widowed spinster of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields in Middlesex assaulted her apprentice Elizabeth Davies and 'cruelly beat her over and beyond the limit of just correction and castigation, so that her life was despaired of'.²¹⁷ Elizabeth Wigenton, a coat-maker of Ratcliff, murdered her thirteen-year-old apprentice by whipping her with a bundle of rods because the girl had not done some work to the standard Elizabeth expected. Alice Wigington also whipped her apprentice to death, but it was unclear whether the theft of money or the spoiling of some work provoked her violence. Elizabeth claimed she had not aimed to kill the girl, and may have been telling the truth. Such stories reveal how physical discipline easily became excessive and the disastrous results of mistresses using extreme force. Even wives of ministers could overstep the mark. Margaret Luke was indicted for murdering Robert Edmunds by beating him so badly that he languished for almost five months before dying.²¹⁸

Mistresses sometimes disciplined their servants with the aid of their husbands. When Samuel Pepys discovered that his maidservant Sarah had let 'a rougueing Scotch woman' into the house he made Elizabeth beat her and together they shut Sarah in the cellar overnight.²¹⁹ In one disastrous case Thomas and Joan Chest were

²¹⁷ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, pp.34, 209-10; Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume IV*, pp.71-72.

²¹⁸ OBP, 17 January 1681, t16810117-1; OBP, 17 January 1681, u16810117-1; OBP, 20 May 1681, t16810520-13.

²¹⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 19 February 1665, vi, p.39.

found guilty and sentenced to be hanged for murdering their maid.²²⁰ By contrast one husband tried to defend a vulnerable servant from his wife. When a young maid approached Elizabeth James asking to be admitted as a servant or as a lodger Elizabeth took her in and was kind and loving to her for a time. When she realised the girl had 'some store of mony' Elizabeth began to borrow money and clothes until the maid had nothing left. The girl complained to her master who spoke sharply to Elizabeth and forced her to return the girl's property. Elizabeth responded violently by dragging the girl by her hair into an inner room of the house, drawing a knife and telling her she would 'be soundly revenged upon her for her hard words, and blowes, that she had received from her husband' because of the complaint before murdering the maid.²²¹ The pamphlet charted the deterioration of one good mistress-servant relationship, and others declined in similar fashion.

Some servants came to realise that their mistresses were of ill repute, and escaped from service as soon as possible.²²² Mary Homes deposed she had been a servant to Elizabeth Dudley in Tuttle Street and Holborn, but 'perceiving her to be of evil repute and an evill woman of her body did much repent her coming to her sought to go from so bad a service', and stayed with Elizabeth less than a month. A few resorted to more extreme methods to deal with an abusive mistress. Margaret Huston claimed that Mrs Merkton did 'misuse her very hardly' and told how she 'bought a pennyworth of quicksilver and mingled the same in a messe of milke thinking thereby to poison her', an attempt that failed.²²³ Other servants found it more difficult to leave. Elizabeth Tauner accused Bridgett Folley of being 'a lewd liver and of noe estimaton and one that was a kinde of nightwalker', claiming that Folley had lied about George Buckley, both 'for that she was an utter enemy of his', and 'for feare of

²²⁰ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.182.

²²¹ *Three Bloodie Murders* (London, 1613), Sig. Cr-v.

²²² Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, pp.327-29; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, 178-81.

²²³ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 13v, 74v.

being turned out of her service and for favour unto her mistress her sister'.²²⁴ Bridgett had gained a bad reputation, and was so scared of being dismissed from service and being unable to find employment that she obeyed her sister and spread malicious gossip. Barbara Allen deposed how she had been a servant to Agnes Wilkinson for about six months when Agnes 'did carrie her to one Mr Brooke', who gave her thirty shillings to have the use of her body, half of which went to Agnes. Barbara's deposition hints that Mr Brooke was not the only man she had slept with for money, but there is no suggestion that she had attempted to escape from her mistress, possibly because she was making a decent living from a combination of domestic service and prostitution.²²⁵

Dealing with male servants brought different complications for mistresses; especially regarding discipline, for such power relations disrupted the expected gender hierarchy.²²⁶ Robert Cleaver condemned physical punishment of male servants by mistresses, claiming it was 'not comely or beseeming, that the wife should take upon her to rule and correct the men servants ... for a mans nature scorneth and disdaineth to be beaten of a woman'.²²⁷ In practice it was rarely possible to segregate household workspace and employees by gender, and it was often the responsibility of the wife to supervise journeymen and male apprentices.²²⁸ As a result mistresses might have to discipline male servants, often for problems relating to violence and sex. Francis Bathe, apprentice to the clothmaker Griffen Wiggess, beat his master and mistress, and broke his mistress's head. Davy John, apprentice to Margaret Moynes, was brought before the Bridewell for drunkenness and for abusing his mistress, whilst John Elcocke was brought in for assaulting his mistress.²²⁹ However, some mistresses

²²⁴ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 137.

²²⁵ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 8r.

²²⁶ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.155-56.

²²⁷ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.377.

²²⁸ Earle, *English Middle Class*, p.163.

²²⁹ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 52v; GL MS 33011/9, fos. 22, 60.

used extreme violence towards male as well as female servants. Mary Allen, a widow living in Whitechapel, assaulted Edward Chaplyn with a broom, and struck a blow on his left shoulder that caused his death the next day.²³⁰ John Bonnders, apprentice to Richard Saunders, sought to let Mary Martin into his master's house 'to the end he might have to do with her', but was prevented by the wife of his master who noticed Mary before she could enter the shop. The mistress of Robert Latimer 'tooke him using the body of one Magdalen upon her stayres who lay in her house and should have been her servant'. The girl was dismissed.²³¹

Adultery between a mistress and her male servant was of great concern in this patriarchal society, and a familiar theme in both separation suits and cheap print.²³² When Richard Fell was brought before the Bridewell governors on 22 April 1598, accused of sleeping with his mistress, Alice God, many 'substantial neighbours' testified that Alice had 'well and honestly behaved herself' for over thirty years, but Amy Miven, a fellow-servant of Richard, claimed to have seen the couple together in suspicious circumstances, 'sometime in the hall in a chaire and sometime also behind the shop where she did see him use her body'. When Richard was asked whether he had called Alice a whore he neither confessed nor denied the allegations until another servant, Thomas Parke, affirmed that he had also seen servant and mistress lie together often. Other servants knew even more about affairs between mistresses and male servants. When Helen Read came before the Bridewell charged with allowing her man-servants to lie with her, she deposed that her servant William Stevens had twice had the use and carnal knowledge of her body 'in the night when her servant Elizabeth Elliott laye in bed also with her'. Helen admitted that another servant, Richard Pearson, had 'allso offered to have to do with her but she denied him'

²³⁰ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*, p.56.

²³¹ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 1v, 58v

²³² Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.190-91, 201-02.

although he 'kissed her divers tymes' subsequently. John Greensmith confirmed these stories, telling how 'he did see his fellow servant kisse his mistress divers tymes in the fields and other places' and 'that when he and his other fellows went to bed in the night the said William would sitt up at worke'.²³³

The opinions servants held of their mistresses and the reports and gossip they might spread could affect significantly the women's reputations.²³⁴ Robert Cleaver warned masters and mistresses not to argue or debate in the presence of their servants, 'for they will not stick to carrie tales, to please the humours of the partie to whom they are most affected. Besides they will spie your infirmities, and grow to a lesse regard of you, and they will blaze abroad such matters to your discredit.'²³⁵ Lady Batten complained to Pepys about how Jane mocked her when she called to her maid within her own house. Samuel had his own problems with servant gossip. He and Elizabeth were unhappy about 'some slight words' their ex-servant Sarah had spoken after she had left their service and joined the household of Sir William Penn, and on another occasion Samuel became concerned that Mercer had 'grown a very gossip'.²³⁶ One jest told of an apprentice being castigated by his master for his gluttony. When the apprentice was told that his mistress 'did not eat the fourth part so much as he, and yet she was plump and fair', he replied, 'I onely eat at set meals, but my Mistress hath Cullises before Dinner, and sweet-meats after dinner, and puts more into her belly then ever you see or heard of'.²³⁷ In *The English Traveller* Young Geraldine suspects a servant-girl of being stirred to anger by some word or blow from her mistress, and of taking revenge by spreading rumours about her.²³⁸ Ann Rowe was set in the stocks at Harefield for accusing her mistress Elizabeth Spencer of 'commanding her to steal

²³³ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 15v, 30v.

²³⁴ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.170-75.

²³⁵ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, p.90.

²³⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 5 November 1662; 26 December 1662, iii, pp.249, 295; 17 March 1667, viii, p.118.

²³⁷ *Poor Robin's Jests*, pp.16-17.

²³⁸ T. Heywood, *The English Traveller* (London, 1633), III. iii. 104-08 in P. Merchant (ed.) *Thomas Heywood: Three marriage plays* (Manchester and New York, 1996), p.155.

a turkeye'.²³⁹ Hugh Snape accused Anne Parman of keeping ill order in her house at midnight, and claimed that 'if it were time that her maides did speake it were a shamefull thing for to speake'. It was from Parman's maidservant that Snape claimed to have obtained the information and he told how Anne had sent her maids to bed at midnight so she could be alone with Daniel Stephenson.²⁴⁰

Servants were frequently called as witnesses to testify about their employers' alleged behaviour, and the evidence they presented could invert the established household hierarchy in which mistresses were supposed to police their servants.²⁴¹ Anne Matthew, servant to Raphe Suretyes, deposed that Jane Wilkinson had come into her kitchen one morning and 'willed her to go up to John Calares chamber and she should see somewhat there'. When Anne followed Jane's suggestion she found her mistress in bed with John Calare and told how her mistress called for a cloak to cover them. Ann found the couple in bed many other times and told her mistress she knew of her behaviour.²⁴² The decision as to whether to inform on a mistress was a matter of individual conscience.²⁴³ Some maids chose not to and were complicit in aiding the misbehaviour of their female employers. Margaret Key described how her mistress Agnes Broke lay in bed at noon and John Baite entered her chamber and lay down next to her. Agnes told Margaret to 'goe away out of the chamber and coffe yf her master did come that she might here.'²⁴⁴ Helen Radhouse deposed how her mistress, Elizabeth Iremonger, made her get out of bed to let Francis Hardwyck in at ten or eleven o'clock at night. Elizabeth ordered Helen to fetch faggots, apples, ale and cushions and to 'sit up in the room all night with Hardwyck', until she was able to leave her sleeping husband and meet him.²⁴⁵

²³⁹ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.23.

²⁴⁰ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 114r, 116v-117r.

²⁴¹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.191-92.

²⁴² GL MS 33011/4, fo. 74r.

²⁴³ Capp, 'Gender, Conscience and Casuistry', pp.128-29.

²⁴⁴ GL MS 33011/3 fo. 2v.

²⁴⁵ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 76v.

Connections between mistresses and servants might continue after the latter had left service. Margaret Jones attended the wedding of her former servant Judith to Ralf Pollard in 1562. Ralf 'dwelt ore against' her and four years later Margaret came before the London consistory court to give evidence of how Ralf had started to beat Judith within a year of their marriage, even when she was pregnant.²⁴⁶ Katherine Cook produced several witnesses 'to testifie her Honesty and good Behaviour in her former services' when she was indicted for theft, and was acquitted. Although the nature of these witnesses is unspecified it would have been likely to have included her previous employers, and those Katherine encountered regularly as she went about her daily work. When Ann Wood was similarly indicted for theft it was her mistress, Mrs Yowle, who claiming that various items, including some ribbon, had gone missing, and that she had discovered the ribbon in Ann's trunk. In her defence Ann produced her former master who had entrusted her with all his goods when his wife has been sick and dying, and he told the court that nothing had gone missing during this period. Several other witnesses also testified to Ann's honesty, claiming that Mrs Yowle was 'a very passionate angry woman' who had never accused Ann of theft until she went to demand her wages.²⁴⁷ The good housewife was therefore a good mistress, and might protect the interests of a former servant for years after she had left. Equally a bad mistress, like Mrs Yowle, could pose a serious threat. In this case the neighbours' sense of her dishonesty and temper made them come to the aid of the servant, and secure her acquittal. Yowle was seen as a bad mistress, and her poor housewifery meant she had forfeited her social credit.

The control of household subordinates was therefore central to definitions of female credit, honour, and self-worth. *The Academy of Pleasure* described a maid who considered it her duty to be her husband's maid and cook, but also 'to know my

²⁴⁶ GL MS 9056, fos. 19r-v.

²⁴⁷ OBP, 1 June 1682, t16820601a-2; 15 May 1684, t16840515-22.

self the Mistresse of the house in the Hall or the Parlour'.²⁴⁸ In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* Touchwood Senior tells his sister Moll she will need to find her tongue 'among maid servants now you keep house'.²⁴⁹ In *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* the new wife finds it difficult to adjust to being the mistress of a household. 'It appears very od[d]ly to her to converse with a new Maid, by reason she must be telling her this thing, and commanding her the t'other; and have a regard of all what she does'.²⁵⁰ This ambiguous comment reflected the dilemma wives faced in seeking to be personable yet commanding respect. Moll will have female companions to gossip with as a mistress, but she must learn to command them as subordinates.

The duties of the good mistress mirrored those of the good mother in that they involved balancing being a firm disciplinarian and teacher of practical skills with being a compassionate employer who would treat her servants as individual human beings and protect the vulnerable. Some mistresses proved extreme in terms of physical discipline, sometimes with tragic results, underlining that discipline was central to the duties of the household matriarch. However, if mistress and servant parted on good terms then the former might generally help the latter, perhaps by leaving a bequest or providing a gift at the end of the hiring. Mistress and servant might also remain in contact after the latter had left service, and either might prove of benefit to the other in subsequent years.

Conclusion

Despite the hard work and long hours involved, most young women aspired to be housewives. 'What a vast difference there is between being a married woman & a maid!' exclaimed the author of *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage*. 'How every one

²⁴⁸ *The Academy of Pleasure* (London, 1656), p.96.

²⁴⁹ Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, V. iv. 47-49, pp.69-70.

²⁵⁰ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, p.74.

receives & treats you! What respect and honour every one shews you!’²⁵¹ Alex Shepard described how hegemonic masculinity involved being an adult, independent patriarchal householder in early modern society.²⁵² This chapter has argued that a complementary ‘hegemonic femininity’ existed, epitomised by the matriarchal housewife. Garthine Walker had argued that by asserting their authority as joint governors of their households, housewives justified their legitimacy to resist those who threatened their families and homes.²⁵³ However, paralleling the situation faced by men, only a limited number of women could exercise matriarchal authority at a particular time. Inexperienced girls could not live up to the required expectations, and older women were thought to be either physically incapable or too argumentative and shrewish to be good housewives. Among other traits and characteristics, men looked for financial competence, good housewifery skills and a large portion when seeking a wife. Once married, women were judged by how they fed, clothed and cared for their household members, and by the pride they took in keeping their houses clean and well furnished. Such efforts were directed towards impressing female neighbours as much as husbands, and the sociability of women in their local communities played a large part in earning them social credit and good reputations.

²⁵¹ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, p.53.

²⁵² Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*.

²⁵³ Walker, *Crime*, p.255.

5. Female neighbourliness and sociability

In London near to Smithfield did I dwell,
And mongst my neighbours was beloved well
Till that the Devill wrought me this same spight
That all their loves are turned to hatred quight.¹

Introduction

On the morning of 5 November 1662 Lady Batten told Samuel Pepys 'that she did not desire, nor hoped I did, that anything should pass between us but what was very civill, though there was not the neighbourliness between her and my wife that was fit to be'. As this anecdote suggests, civility and neighbourliness were important for early modern women as well as men. In 1666 neighbours were on the agenda once more when Pepys visited Mrs Turner. 'I find she tells me the faults of all of them and their bad words of me and my wife, and ended doth discover more than I thought', he wrote. 'I will have nothing to do with any of them'. But Pepys added that Mrs Turner gave him 'a present of shells' for his wife, and he remarked that she 'seems to have great respect and honour for my wife'.² Such references to gifts and to gossiping neighbours raise a question explored by many social historians; the extent to which it was possible to abide by values of neighbourliness in crowded early modern urban communities.

Early modern people believed that good neighbourliness promoted harmony and cooperation. Communal land use, honouring of local custom, and celebration of life-cycle stages aided this process in traditional rural communities. Neighbourliness provided a sense of place and of selfhood within certain boundaries, operating

¹ 'Anne Wallens Lamentation', *Pepys* i, p.124.

² Pepys, *Diary*, 5 November 1662, iii, p.249; 20 April 1666, vii, p.105.

primarily between settled inhabitants and those newcomers accepted by the local community. It implied equality and mutuality even if those concerned were unequal in wealth or status. Neighbours were to seek to live in peace, quiet, love and charity, to avoid placing unnecessary burdens upon each other, and to seek consensus regarding proper conduct. More personal friendships emerged from neighbourliness that involved higher levels of mutual trust, as well as practical and emotional support. Neighbours offered food, goods, hospitality and money as forms of support on the assumption that good will and reciprocal aid could be obtained from the recipient if needed. Peace and friendship obliged neighbours to settle disputes by arbitration and canon law allowed parties in conflict opportunities to resolve differences through negotiation and avoid breaches of neighbourliness. However, despite such ideals being widely accepted, personal conflicts and differences in social station, age, and gender made the fulfilment of good neighbourliness problematic.³

Laura Gowing has noted that neighbourly behaviour was a means for women to earn good names within their communities, providing them with social and legal credit.⁴ Emanuel van Meteren described how many Englishwomen spent their time ‘in visiting their friends and keeping company, conversing with their equals (whom they term gosseps) and their neighbours, and making merry with them at child-births, christenings, and funerals, and all this with the permission and knowledge of their husbands’.⁵ Similarly, Bernard Capp has argued that ‘good neighbourliness’ was one of the few active virtues commended in women, and that the credit women earned by

³ K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London, 1982), pp.51-57; id., ‘The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England’ in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp.18-22; id., *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470-1750* (London, 2002), pp.75-78; J. A. Sharpe, “‘Such Disagreement betwyx Neighbours’: Litigation and Human Relations in Early Modern England’ in J. Bossy (ed.), *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.167-87; J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985), pp.57-62.

⁴ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.129, 132.

⁵ W. B. Rye (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James the First* (London, 1865), p.72.

having good reputations and standing in their neighbourhood affected the levels of protection and support they could hope for if they came into conflict with other women or men.⁶ Phil Withington notes that ‘the house was no refuge from the public exigencies of sociability’ and ‘the publicness of women, and their participation in and control over certain kinds of civil company and conversation, gave them direct and indirect influence over civic politics. This power emanated from their brokerage of reputation and opinion, especially of the honesty – sexual, religious and economic – of family, friends, and neighbours; and through the translation of that influence, through networks of kin, friends, and communicants, into places and networks of civic authority’.⁷ Most women relied on neighbours rather than kin, for example as compurgators in court, and the friendships women developed were based more often on propinquity than kinship. Female neighbourliness comprised social interactions such as eating, drinking and conversing together, borrowing and loaning domestic implements, attending the same church, giving and receiving charity and hospitality, visiting the pregnant, sick, and dying, and sharing childcare and work. Through these daily contacts women often regarded the dwellings and possessions of neighbours in some senses as common property, suggesting that despite differences of rank, age, and marital status some sense of a shared gender condition existed, resulting from neighbourliness, that could blossom into close friendships.⁸ Many women had circles or networks of female friends or gossips to provide moral support and some level of social autonomy for those trapped in oppressive patriarchal households. Women operated economies of mutual favours to provide each other with help and information. Networks of this sort offered a focus for female recreation and enabled

⁶ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.27, 224.

⁷ P. Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), p.229.

⁸ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.206-10, 231-42; R. A. Houlbrooke, ‘Women’s social life and common action in England from the fifteenth century to the eve of the civil war’, *Continuity and Change*, 1:2 (1986), pp.172-75.

women to generate collective pressure to police the boundaries of moral communities. However, female sociability was often viewed with suspicion by men, and some women used their female networks to conceal sexual liaisons or to assist in criminal activities.⁹

Most London women thus belonged to distinct neighbourhood communities in which they were expected to conform to particular standards of expected behaviour, based on Christian morality and local customs. Moreover, women sought to define their own values of good neighbourliness and have some input into who was included and excluded from their local communities. What sorts of behaviour earned a woman a reputation as a good neighbour? Was it acceptable for women to drink with their neighbours, and if so under what circumstances? But how much freedom did women have to interact with their male and female neighbours before suspicions of bad behaviour, immorality and inappropriate intimacy began to circulate?

Keeping company: neighbourliness, friendship, and sociability

Early modern clergymen were always suspicious of what they considered extravagant female sociability. Matthew Griffith believed that good wives were 'to be keepers at home; not idly, and unnecessarily to gossip it abroad', telling the female reader not 'to wander about from house to house being idle; and not idle onely, but a tatler also, and a busie body, speaking things which thou ought'st not to'.¹⁰ Thomas Gataker condemned gadding wives and also those who sat idly at home and 'have their gossips

⁹ B. Capp, 'Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England' in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp.125-37; id., *When Gossips Meet*, pp.49-68, 284-87, 327-33, 345-48; Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.58-65. The vocabulary used to refer to all-female groups is much debated. For critiques of the word 'gossip' to refer to all-female groups, and of gossip as a distinctively female activity, see Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p.211; D. Turner, "'Nothing is so secret but shall be revealed": The Scandalous Life of Robert Foulkes' in T. Hitchcock and M. Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London, 1999), pp.171-72, 176-77; L. Gowing, Review of B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), *Reviews in History* <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/gowingL.html> (27 November 2005).

¹⁰ M. Griffith, *Bethel: Or A Forme for Families* (London, 1633), pp.130, 140.

come and sitt with them to tell tales and newes'. According to Gataker, such women 'care not, nor regard what their husbands do, or what business becomes of them ... so long as by helpe of friends or other provisions they are able ... to shift for themselves'.¹¹ Daniel Rogers wrote of women 'forsaking their bosome fellowship' of marriage to 'runne into the company of strangers, to converse with: to them they impart their marriage discontents, crave counsel, advise from them, betraying ... their husbands to base report'. Rogers denounced the woman 'whose heeles are over her neighbours thresholde, and, being there, is in her Element, licentious, and talkative', and deemed it shameful for women to have their husbands fetch them from their gossips. However, Rogers advised husbands to allow some opportunities for their wives to talk with friends to benefit their bodies and spirits.¹² Thomas Hilder attacked 'jolly, jocund and junketing Dames', who he believed robbed their husbands, and warned men of women 'who are gadders abroad to Faires, and every meeting of pleasure ... not knowing in what place, nor in what company to spend their time'.¹³ Barnabe Rich complained of shameless women pursuing their own pleasures and delights, desiring novelties and delicacies, and attending banquets.¹⁴ Such attitudes continued into the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the writings of Daniel Defoe and Bernard de Mandeville.¹⁵

However, alongside these condemnations other writers stressed the need for women to maintain a good reputation by interacting with their neighbours. Gervase Markham noted that a good housewife should be 'constant in friendship' and 'full of good Neighbour-hood'.¹⁶ The author of *The Confession of the New Married Couple*

¹¹ T. Gataker, *Marriage Duties Briefly Couched Together* (London, 1620), pp.22-24.

¹² D. Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour: Or, The Mutuall Crowne and Comfort of Godly, Loyall, and Chaste Marriage* (London, 1642), pp.136, 248, 277-78.

¹³ T. Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell: or, Seasonable Advise, both to Unmarried, and Married Persons* (London, 1653), pp.52-53.

¹⁴ B. Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London, 1613), p.27.

¹⁵ Earle, *English Middle Class*, pp.163-66.

¹⁶ G. Markham, *The English House-Wife* (London, 1637), p.4.

described how the good husband would allow his wife to visit those of her 'good acquaintance' and in the evening would go to fetch her home.¹⁷ While advising men against choosing wives who had been known to keep ill company, Matthew Griffith noted that the good conversation of friends and neighbours could benefit the health of a woman's soul. Women would need to go to 'holy' and 'friendly' meetings' and visit other women 'according to the duties of charity and good neighbourhood'; though he added that such visits ought to be only 'for household occasions' or when a husband required his wife to accompany him.¹⁸ Another conduct book suggested that entertaining only 'godly friends' was desirable.¹⁹ Robert Cleaver also placed firm boundaries on female sociability. The good female neighbour was to 'avoide gossiping, further than the lawe of good neighbourhoode doth require', and 'be warie, whom she admitteth into her house, to sit long there, knowing that there occupation is but to marke & carrie'. She was to be courteous, affable, modest, mild and bashful, 'passing by offences for unities sake' and speaking discretely only 'upon good occasion'. Such a woman was to 'heare and see and say the best' and to 'soone breake off talke, with such in whom she perceiveth no wisdom, nor favour nor grace'. She was not 'to beleeue reports, nor [be] readie to tell them againe, to fill the time with talke', to be 'helpfull in all things to prevent breaches, or else to make them up againe', and to be 'glad of the good of others ... wisely considering what is meete for her selfe, and what her estate will beare'.²⁰

Concerns about female sociability focussed on who women associated with, and the precise nature of such interactions, but discussions of the personal and private lives of neighbours were a prominent feature of public company, and several conduct book authors articulated the need to listen to and assess the trustworthiness of gossip

¹⁷ A. Marsh, *The Confession of the New Married Couple, Being the Second Part of the Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (London, 1683), pp.102-03.

¹⁸ Griffith, *Bethel*, p.416.

¹⁹ S. B., *Counsel to the Husband: to the Wife Instruction* (London, 1608), p.62.

²⁰ R. Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1598), pp.95-97.

when forming judgements about women.²¹ Patrick Hannay told women to converse only ‘with such, as foule mouth’d malice can with no crime tutch’, and to keep a distance from women who encouraged division between spouses. ‘The grave, staid, blamelesse, and religious Dames, whose carriage hath procur’d them honest names; are fit companions, let such be thy Mates’, he advised.²² By contrast John Wing claimed a woman’s reputation could be gauged ‘if one can well observe her most familiars’ such as her gossips and friends.²³ ‘Show me her companions, and I will show thee her conditions’, wrote Matthew Griffith. ‘[They] will either quicken her in the wayes of God, or sully her with the filth of their sinnes’.²⁴ Joseph Swetnam warned male readers that if they married a woman of evil report ‘hir discredit will be a spot in thy browe, thou canst not goe in the street with hir without mocks, nor amongst thy neighbours without frumps’. Swetnam advised a man considering a possible marriage partner to make ‘diligent enquiry of her behaviour, for by the market-folke thou shalt heare how the market goeth, for by enquiry thou shalt heare whether she be wise, virtuous and kinde’.²⁵ But William Crompton warned that although women were judged by what was heard of them, not all gossip ought to be believed, for ‘some invent to publish what may please their owne, or the itching fancie of an ill-willed neighbour; some pass sentence rashly, without Iudgement or experience, upon hear-say from others as bad as themselves’. Only ‘the best and most iudicious, who are so observant of good things’, could be trusted to provide accurate character reports.²⁶ Women were thus to steer clear of malicious gossips, and weigh carefully any tales they heard, not least because both women and men were told that they could judge any woman by the company she kept.

²¹ Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, p.149.

²² P. Hannay, *A Happy Husband. Or, Directions for a Maide to chose her Mate* (London, 1619).

²³ J. Wing, *The Crowne Conjugall Or, The Spouse Royall* (Middelburgh, 1620), p.110.

²⁴ Griffith, *Bethel*, pp.264-65.

²⁵ J. Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, idle, froward and unconstant women* (London, 1615), pp.9, 46.

²⁶ W. Crompton, *A Lasting Jewell For Religious Woemen* (London, 1630), p.30.

The clerical authors who praised the lives of godly women in funeral sermons emphasised piety as their chief virtue, but some also emphasised duties to family and neighbours.²⁷ Matthew Fowler considered Ann Smith to have been a good neighbour and highly esteemed friend who had enjoyed ‘a good report of all’. Mourning her death at the age of twenty-two, Fowler insisted that ‘it matters not so much how long we live as how well’, suggesting that even in an early modern gerontocracy the young as well as the old could gain praise for good neighbourliness.²⁸ However, such female paragons were often selective in their neighbourliness and did not usually participate in social rounds common to other women. Katherine Stubbes went rarely to banquets, feasts, or ‘to Gossipe or make merry’, and when she did it was in the company of her husband, Philip. When he was absent none of Katherine’s friends could persuade her to go ‘to dinner or supper, to playes or interludes, nor to any other pastimes or disposes whatsoever’, and some found her behaviour contemptuous and disdainful.²⁹ Katherine Bettergh did not attend ‘dancing greenes, markets, or publike assemblies’, preferring ‘to be a doore-keeper in the house of God, then to have societie with the wicked’.³⁰ Dorothy Hanbury ‘had a discerning spirit, and would guesse at those who had but a forme of holinesse, distributing her respects accordingly’. Dorothy enjoyed the company of ‘the meanest saints’, could not endure ‘loose Christians’, and disliked ‘complementall visits, and running up and downe in the circle of pleasures’ and ‘the vanity and frothnesse which she saw and heard’.³¹ Margaret Ducke ‘went seldom abroad’ and declined the hospitality of ‘Noble and Honourable Ladies’ in case she was tempted by their vanities. However, on her deathbed Margaret summoned ‘some

²⁷ A. Laurence, ‘Daniel’s Practice: The Daily Round of Godly Women in Seventeenth-Century England’ in R. Swanson (ed.) *The Use and Abuse of Time in Church History*, Studies in Church History, 37 (Bury St Edmonds, 2002), pp.173-75.

²⁸ M. Fowler, *Gods Esteem of the Death of his Saints* (London, 1656), pp.22-24. Cf. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.50.

²⁹ P. Stubbes, *A Christall Glasse for Christian Women* (London, 1612), pp.4-5.

³⁰ *The Christian Life and Death of Mistris Katherin Bettergh* (London, 1612), Sig. A2r.

³¹ S. Ainsworth, *A Sermon Preached at the Funerall of that religious Gentle-woman Mis. Dorothy Hanbury* (London, 1645), pp.27, 29-30.

Gentlewomen of her neighbours' to whom she expressed 'her comforts and assurances of everlasting life' and they prayed together, showing that Margaret did have a female network to call upon at critical moments, albeit a restricted one.³² Mary Bewley enjoyed 'spiritual conference, and the communion of Saints' and believed it was important that Christians should watch over each other, although when amongst gentlewomen she had difficulty interrupting their 'poor, low discourse' to 'bring in more profitable and edifying' conversation. However, Mary did not always place her faith before worldly concerns, and once broke off from her prayers to speak with someone who was knocking at her closet door.³³ Godly women thus restricted themselves for the most part to the company of others of their sex who shared their religious beliefs.

By contrast Elizabeth Pepys valued companionship and enjoyed socialising, spending time in the company of various people. In January 1663 Samuel recorded Elizabeth speaking 'of the necessity of her keeping somebody to bear her company' and how she had no other company but her servants. Elizabeth wished to know as much as possible about her neighbours, and Samuel recorded how she 'tells me great stories of the gossiping women of the parish, what this and what that woman was'.³⁴ Although Elizabeth Pepys's personal behaviour was prompted by a combination of loneliness and natural curiosity, contemporary concepts of company derived from humanist principles of association and commerce that became central to notions of community, evoking ideals of fellowship and brotherhood among citizens of urban commonwealths. Company was a unifying force in corporations, parishes, and guilds, binding households and neighbourhoods together, and structuring and encouraging sociability and a love of society. However, the 'mutual commerce' that company

³² W. Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon Preached by Dr Gouge of Blackfriars London, in Cheswicke Church, August 24. 1646. At the Funeralls of Mrs Margaret Ducke Wife of Dr Ducke, one of the Masters of Requests to his Majesty* (London, 1646), pp.28, 39.

³³ E. Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution for Christian Women* (London, 1659), pp.7-9.

³⁴ Pepys, *Diary*, 9 January 1663, iv, p.10; 21 November 1667, viii, p.544.

encouraged excluded some groups and assigned places and roles to limit the nature of personal interactions. Company implied an affective companionate relationship, but also encompassed various forms of urban sociability that extended beyond the geographical boundaries of civic communities. This politics of participation aimed to include and exclude individuals based on various criteria, including honesty, credit, and gender. Rituals and conventions of performance were part of the process of inclusion within a company, of which many coexisted at any moment. Company therefore impacted on individual moral standing, but was not the sole criterion of its definition.³⁵

Elizabeth and Samuel Pepys emulated such models of politeness and sociability. One evening in 1666 Samuel returned home at eleven o'clock in the evening and went into the garden with Elizabeth and Mercer, where they sang until midnight 'with mighty pleasure to ourselves and neighbours, by their casements opening'. Both Samuel and Elizabeth were 'mightily pleased' with the company of Betty Michell whom they met in 1666, and the following January together with Mercer and Barker they visited the Michells 'with some neats' tongues and cake and wine; and there sat with the little couple with great pleasure'.³⁶ However, when socialising without his wife, Pepys used the term 'company' in other ways to describe his relationships with women that carried romantic and sexual overtones. Whilst visiting Epsom Wells Samuel walked in Minnes's wood and recalled 'with great pleasure viewing my old walks and where Mrs Hely and I did use to walk and talk with whom I had the first sentiments of love and pleasure in women's company'. When taking the air at Highgate with Mary he was 'much pleased with her company, pretty and innocent, and had what pleasure almost I would with her'. Pepys referred to women's company in more civil fashion as well. When Mrs Turner and Mercer

³⁵ Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, pp.127-37.

³⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 5 May 1666; 15 July 1666, vii, pp.117, 206-07; 30 January 1667, viii, p.37.

came to sup with him one evening he was 'well pleased ... with their company'.³⁷ When her husband was away from London on business, one fictional wife invited her nieces, bridesmaids, 'and other good acquaintance' to take tea with her. She had been invited to similar gatherings on several occasions before she was married, and felt ashamed for not having returned the favours, highlighting the reciprocal nature of female hospitality. Many of the women were accompanied by men, some of whom also attended the party, but the wife also invited only her female friends to share hot buns and cakes with her one morning at nine o'clock, followed by fruit, pancakes, and fritters in the afternoon, suggesting that on some occasions she desired company in a single-sex environment.³⁸

Socialising in groups comprising members of both sexes presented many problems for women, both wives and spinsters, in judging when, where and how they could be in male company without inviting criticism, as well as what degree of familiarity was acceptable. The manner in which women and men interacted was vitally important in an age when ambiguous words and gestures could signify the making of legally binding marriage contracts. Women refused or accepted offers, but some chose to give conditional answers to buy time.³⁹ Many ballads encouraged young women and girls to flirt with and kiss men, depicting such interactions as harmless fun with few or no detrimental consequences. *The Merry Forester* claimed that kissing gave no offence and deemed it common courtesy for women to be saluted with kisses 'in house, in field or in the streete'.⁴⁰ *Loves Victory Obtained* claimed 'kissing, playing, talking' were everyday aspects of courtship, and argued that maids could be 'sporting' with young men, 'yet be fair and honest too'.⁴¹ 'I vow and protest I will do thee no harm', a London gallant declared in *The Merry Mans Resolution*,

³⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 26 July 1663, iv, p.247; 11 July 1665, vi, p.155; 16 April 1666, vii, p.101.

³⁸ Marsh, *Confession*, pp.52-56.

³⁹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.141.

⁴⁰ 'The Merry Forrester', *Pepys* i, p.225.

⁴¹ 'Loves Victory Obtained', *Pepys* iii, p.32.

telling the maid how they would ‘handle and cuddle’ and toy and kiss. ‘What harm honest Neighbours can come of all this’, asked the balladeer.⁴² The answer depended on who one kissed, and in what circumstances as kissing could imply either polite sociability or potentially scandalous intimacy.⁴³ Not all ballads were so light-hearted about the potential consequences of intimate sociability between the sexes. The protagonist of *The Bloody Miller* seduced and impregnated a young woman, but ‘kept company’ with another maid for whom he deserted the first girl.⁴⁴

Neighbours closely observed interactions between the sexes for indications of improper familiarity or intimacy. These in turn might be equated with sexual activity, depending on the context and the character of the persons. Women were generally perceived as sexually unstable and were often thought to be at risk in mixed company.⁴⁵ Their attempts at engaging in polite neighbourhood sociability were thus always more problematic than those of men. Many people came before the courts for ‘keeping company’ with members of the opposite sex, and often one of the parties was married to someone else.⁴⁶ Henry Andrewes confessed to having supped one evening ‘in the companye of Walles Wife’, but denied having the use of her body. Although their interactions were obviously perceived as suspicious, Andrewes insisted they had been innocent.⁴⁷ Similarly Johan Jennings confessed to keeping company with Thomas Johnson, a married man from Smithfield, but there was no direct reference to sexual misbehaviour.⁴⁸ In other contexts the idea of keeping company was frequently equated with courtship. Francis Tracey was tried on

⁴² ‘The Merry Mans Resolution Or a London Frolick’, *Pepys* iii, p.185.

⁴³ Turner, ‘Nothing is so secret’, pp.184-85.

⁴⁴ ‘The Bloody Miller’, *Pepys* ii, p.156.

⁴⁵ S. Amussen, ‘The Gendering of Popular Culture in Early Modern England’ in T. Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England, c.1500-1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp.56-57.

⁴⁶ F. Dabhoiwala, ‘The pattern of sexual immorality in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London’ in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), p.91.

⁴⁷ GL MS 33011/3, fo. 16r.

⁴⁸ GL MS 33011/5, fo. 3r.

suspicion of having stolen five gold rings, a medal and three shillings from Charity Mathews, but it was revealed that he was 'a Company-keeper of hers' and it was therefore deemed likely she had given him the items.⁴⁹

The phrase 'keeping company' was also deployed in connection with extra-marital sexual liaisons.⁵⁰ Ephram Sowewood was 'a lewde woman whoe keepeth company carnally with one Nich[ol]as Bedgood', a scrivener and married man from Holborn.⁵¹ On 1 March 1597 William Spawlding confessed to being acquainted with Elizabeth Moris, wife of Henry Moris, for about a year and a quarter, described being 'in her companie at Knightsbridge', and admitted that since 22 February he had enjoyed 'the use and carnall knowledge of her body evre weeke'.⁵² Accused of murdering his wife George Allen was said to have kept company and been in league with a woman whom he had promised to marry, 'telling her his wife in the Country had married another man'.⁵³ In seeking to explain his actions Allen claimed that his wife had 'kept others Company' and that he 'could not therefore live contented' with her.⁵⁴ When Alice Pennington discovered her husband William in bed with Judith Dimmock she reported them to the Bridewell authorities, and it emerged that they had 'so kept company together this 14 yeres'. Most interesting of all was Ann Bowell, brought in for keeping company with another man's wife. Discussing this and other similar cases, Laura Gowing suggests that although there may have been a sexual meaning attached to the notion of keeping company, it is likely that this particular case illustrates concerns about single women socialising with other women who might corrupt them into whoredom, or crime, or insubordination, and of married women

⁴⁹ OBP, 7 December 1687, t16871207-15.

⁵⁰ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.115-16.

⁵¹ GL MS 33011/5, fo. 21v.

⁵² GL MS 33011/4, fo. 7v.

⁵³ *News from the Sessions. Or, The Whole Tryal of George Allen The Butcher Who Murthered his Wife in the Fields behind Islington, On Friday the 5th of the Instant February, And the manner how the same came to be Discovered* (London, 1675), p.5.

⁵⁴ OBP, 19 February 1675, o16750219-1.

devoting their time and emotions to other women, rather than to their husbands.⁵⁵ In 1638 Anne Skinner, a widow lodging in Golding Lane, was bound over for ‘maintaining her self in the habit of a gentlewoman’ and could ‘give very small account of her conversation or living’.⁵⁶ Anne was in trouble for dressing above her social station, and for being unable to explain how she had acquired such expensive clothes, but her lack of respectable ‘conversation’ brought her into further disrepute.⁵⁷ The company one kept and how one behaved in company were thus clearly important components in establishing and maintaining a good name and standing.

Other women were accused of keeping company with dubious individuals or groups, rather than with particular men with whom it was assumed they were having sexual relations. Timothy Chillewell described seeing one Thompson ‘goe w[i]th Jane Ridley afore her in Southwark and he thinketh to some ill company’.⁵⁸ Samuel Pepys recorded Elizabeth informing him ‘how ill a report our Mercer hath got by her keeping company, so that she will not send for her to dine with us or be with us as heretofore’.⁵⁹ In *The Roaring Girl* Laxton says that Moll slips ‘from one company to another like a fat eel between a Dutchman’s fingers’.⁶⁰

Moll Cutpurse was not the only woman in early modern London to acquire a reputation for flitting between male companions. When Mary Homes gave evidence against her ex-mistress Elizabeth Dudley she was asked ‘what ill company’ she had seen her mistress in. Thomas Walin provided more detailed information concerning Elizabeth, deposing that she had lodged with him in Bishopsgate Street, and that when

⁵⁵ GL MS 33011/5, fo. 19r-v; L. Gowing, ‘The Politics of Female Friendship in Early Modern England’ in L. Gowing, M. Hunter and M. Rubin (eds.), *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp.137, 147.

⁵⁶ LMA MJ/SR/844, item 168. I would like to thank Professor Bernard Capp for this reference.

⁵⁷ The OED provides various definitions of conversation: ‘The action of consorting or having dealings with others; living together; commerce, intercourse [including sexual intercourse], society, intimacy’; ‘circle of acquaintance, company, society’; ‘manner of conducting oneself in the world or in society’; ‘behaviour, mode or course of life; ‘interchange of thoughts and words; familiar discourse or talk’.

⁵⁸ GL MS 33011/3, fo. 4r.

⁵⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 24 February 1667, viii, p.79.

⁶⁰ T. Dekker and T. Middleton, *The Roaring Girl or Moll Cutpurse* (London, 1611) in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), III, 187-88, p.244.

he 'had occasion to travell into Yorkshire ... there resorted to this house to Elizabeth one Wiseman a silkman in Cheapside one Prat a draper in Powles churchyard a linen drapers Servant and Apprentice in Friday Street being a gentleman borne with whome she would often go abroad and stay forth very late in the night'. Walin claimed 'all the parties ... who resorted to her ... being then men of good ability shortly after became bankrupt and little worth', and reported that a dreyman who spotted Elizabeth called her 'an arrant whore and ... did much marvell that any honest man would give her entertainment'.⁶¹ William Jordaine drew on similar notions about the expense of excessive sociability when he defamed Anne Haiding as the butcher's whore, claiming the man in question had spent five hundred pounds on her company.⁶² Such stories reinforce the argument that consumption and expenditure were central to constructions of the whore, the demands of such women for maintenance leading to the downfall of their male associates.⁶³

A woman's good name was especially vulnerable if she consorted with men of low social and economic standing. Such men possessed little or no credit, and could not be prospective marriage partners, at least not in the foreseeable future. They were often assumed to be dishonest and promiscuous, and women who consorted with them were assumed to be disreputable sellers of alcohol or sex.⁶⁴ Catherine Barnaby claimed that Grace Dickenson was a drunken quean who 'goest a drinking from house to house everyday' and kept company 'with none but peddlers and roagues and theeves'.⁶⁵ Elizabeth Merrick accused Elinor Wright of running up and down the country with a fiddler.⁶⁶ Grace and Elinor were accused of associating with men who

⁶¹ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 13v-14r.

⁶² LMA DL/C/235, fo. 6v.

⁶³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.90-91.

⁶⁴ A. Shepard, 'Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c.1580 – 1640', *Past and Present*, 167 (May 2000), pp.75-106; id., *Meanings of Manhood*, pp.186-213; Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p.212.

⁶⁵ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 174v.

⁶⁶ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 241v-242r. Cf. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.85, 221 for further references to women keeping company with fiddlers, apprentice boys, and idle servants.

were not respectable potential husbands, and were unlikely to be in the foreseeable future, if ever. Their sociability was thus placed beyond the boundaries of female respectability, an excuse for drinking, gadding, and by implication illicit sex.

Women were aware of how those they kept company with could affect their reputation, and the respectable sought through various means to disassociate themselves from such men. If circumstances required a married woman to meet with another man, she would try to ensure that a third person was also present, and that she was never alone with him in a private room. In June 1635 Elizabeth Wyatt insisted that she had never kept company with Mr Braid 'at unlawfull howres nor in suspitious places', and that other neighbours had accompanied her when three years previously she had been to Braid's house to visit his wife who was then distracted.⁶⁷ In 1638, in the presence of her friends, Mrs Landers confronted Thomas Barwick in the Mermaid Tavern in Ratcliff, and claimed that he had sought her company on numerous occasions in her house, and had written letters to her. Landers had told Barwick often that this was 'contrarie to her will and liking', and that he impaired her credit by doing so.⁶⁸ Similarly Martha Le Pong claimed that because one Mr Maw had visited Jane Lupton on a regular basis, when the couple were 'sometimes halfe an houre or an houre together in publick company', her reputation had suffered. However, Martha believed the couple were never in private together, and acknowledged that Jane 'always kept him at too great a distance' to allow Maw any opportunity to display his love and affection, or 'to have courted her in the way of marriage'.⁶⁹ The importance of keeping unsuitable men at a distance was frequently depicted in Jacobean drama. In *The Roaring Girl* Mistress Gallipot requests Laxton to respect her credit and not

⁶⁷ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 174v.

⁶⁸ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 139v-140v. Barwick reacted badly to the comments and defamed Landers as a 'bold impudent alluring tempting queane and lieing Jade'.

⁶⁹ Earle, *City Full of People*, p.231.

behave in an overly familiar manner to her.⁷⁰ In *Bartholomew Fair* when Winwife and Quarlous compete for the affections of Grace, she sidesteps their advances by claiming they would think her immodest and ‘a woman of an extreme levity ... or a strange fancy’ if she confessed to feelings for either of them, having known them only two hours.⁷¹ Sociable interaction with men was for the most part unavoidable, and many women probably enjoyed the company of the opposite sex, but many women, especially wives, recognised that any social interaction with men had to be conducted with scrupulous care if it was not to arouse suspicion and criticism.

The attempts of one woman to avoid the unwanted company of a man resulted in tragic consequences. On 9 August 1687 a feast was held at Leather-sellers Hall at which a dancing bout ensued. Simon Durrant caught hold of Ann Sadler and ‘obliged her to dance, which she did for almost a quarter of an hour, and then she being about to make her escape from him, he pursued her and puling her back by force threw her down, and tumbled with her over and over; so that being bruised thereby, she went home and sickened’. Anne died of her injuries on 3 September and Simon was tried for her murder on 12 October, pleading that ‘her dancing was with her own consent and as for the rest it was but a Frolick, and he intended no harm’. Durrant was able to bring credible witnesses to testify for him and was acquitted.⁷²

Although the company one kept was important in defining respectability, from the early seventeenth century the need for civility at all times, in all companies, and to all people was emphasised increasingly. Civility was a multifaceted concept used to define principles of political order derived from civic humanism, and a related set of increasingly personal ethical values that participants in civil society were expected to conform to. Civility was therefore an aspiration, a virtue and means of self-discipline

⁷⁰ T. Dekker and T. Middleton, *The Roaring Girl or Moll Cutpurse* (London, 1611) in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), 3, 48-49, p.240.

⁷¹ B. Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* (London, 1631), IV. iii. 19-24 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.) *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.562.

⁷² OBP, 12 October 1687, t16871012-38.

that needed to be learned, and that promoted neighbourly values such as peace, quiet, concord, fellowship, and friendship.⁷³ Civility required personal and social *honestas*, a combination of a self-reflective and discrete disposition with ‘an acute appreciation of place, company, conversation, and performance’. Such qualities were supposed to characterise all domestic, neighbourly, and commercial company and conversations of male and female urban citizens.⁷⁴ Civility in manners and deportment as part of refined sociability was thus something for women of the middling and respectable poorer sorts to aspire to. Women often deployed ideas about civility when deposing in the church courts, referring to polite and appropriate means of social interaction with all sorts of people as a means of mediating conflict and strife. However, female ideas about civility also focused on modesty and sexual propriety, with the term synonymous for ‘modest’, ‘sober’, or ‘chaste’. Moreover women were expected to be civil to different people in different ways. They were to be well-mannered and polite to all their social superiors and to men, and to be neighbourly and friendly to women of their own social rank. In seeking to achieve both these aims women found that being civil entailed the negotiation of boundaries of authority.⁷⁵

Frequent reference was made to civil behaviour on the London stage. In the context of marital relations such references were related to the politics of hospitality. In *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* Chartley says he is ‘married to a civil maid’.⁷⁶ By contrast in *The Roaring Girl* Gallipot is shocked when his wife Prue rises suddenly from the table and abandons his friends in a manner he deems to be uncivil.⁷⁷ In *A Fond Husband* Bubble says he will ‘give my friend leave at any time to chastise my Wife if she don’t behave her self civilly’, a comment that highlighted the problems of

⁷³ A. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998), pp.43-74.

⁷⁴ Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, p.266.

⁷⁵ S. Mendelson, ‘The Civility of Women in Seventeenth-Century England’ in P. Burke, B. Harrison, and P. Slack (eds.), *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford, 2000), pp.111-25.

⁷⁶ Heywood, *Wise-woman*, V. vi. 70 in Merchant (ed.) *Thomas Heywood*, p.99.

⁷⁷ Dekker and Middleton, *Roaring Girl*, 6, 6-7, p.260.

female civility when uttered by a cuckold.⁷⁸ *The Devil is an Ass* explores dilemmas of female civility directly when Fitzdottrel tells Lady Eitherside and Lady Tailbrush that in order to be civil they must not deny himself or Wittipol anything. His remark that bawdry 'is (in itself) as civil a discourse' reveals how slim the line was between hospitality and polite sociability and prostitution and bawdry.⁷⁹ In *The Alchemist* Epicure Mammon requests a kiss from Dol who rebukes him, saying that it would be uncivil of her to allow him to behave in such a manner.⁸⁰

Good neighbourliness was an aspiration for women and was deemed beneficial to their moral and social well-being. However, many restrictions were placed on the nature of female sociability, and problems could easily arise through the ambiguous nature of concepts such as company and civility. 'Company' carried many positive connotations, but because it was also almost a euphemism for courtship, it also had sexual undertones that made it difficult for women to establish non-sexual friendships with men. Relations with married men were tightly restricted, and single women were urged to avoid the company of single men of low socio-economic credit. Women were expected to behave in a civil fashion towards men, but frequently social interactions between the sexes lay on the boundary of respectability.

Hospitality, charity, and relief

Part of being a good neighbour involved aiding those living close to you. One means by which women and men could do this was through hospitality, providing liberal and kindly entertainment in the home in the form of food, drink, or lodgings. Bestowing charity on all and sundry was a traditional medieval ideal that contemporaries agreed was in decay by the sixteenth century, although Steve Hindle has argued general

⁷⁸ T. D'Urfey, *A Fond Husband: Or, The Plotting Sisters* (London, 1676), p.15.

⁷⁹ B. Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass* (London, 1631), IV. iv. 169, 176-77 in M. J. Kidnie (ed.), *The Devil is an Ass and other plays* (Oxford, 2000), p.300.

⁸⁰ B. Jonson, *The Alchemist* (London, 1616), IV. i. 33-35, in G. A. Wilkes (ed.) *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), p.431.

hospitality and outdoor relief was being promoted as late as the 1590s. However, after the introduction of the Elizabethan Poor Laws most commentators advised giving money, food, and clothes to deserving poor neighbours, but not taking in strangers, unless confident about them. Whilst tracts on the importance of hospitality usually stressed its importance for the county gentry, it also played an important role for the urban middling sorts. But hospitality needed to be bounded within the virtuous limits of moderation. Traditional unwritten rules of hospitality expected hosts to care primarily for poor neighbours or strangers, differentiating hospitality from good fellowship and housekeeping. Yet most instincts and prescriptive advice favoured neighbours ahead of strangers, and despite moralists' condemnations many people entertained neighbours, tenants and social superiors rather than the poor, arguing that neighbourhood hospitality fostered friendships, strengthened community, and encouraged civil and urbane good manners. Urban living was linked with selective visiting and declining hospitality, and traditionally in town and city the middling sort dispensed hospitality.⁸¹ Metropolitan hospitality was smaller and more selective than the rural ideal. Londoners might endow a private charity to advertise their generosity rather than keep open house, and providing employment or loaning money also offered power and influence.⁸² Female hospitality was generally even more specific, usually belonging to the kitchen, parlour, or bedchamber.⁸³

Similarly charity in the sense of goodwill was expected between neighbours, because those unable to live in harmony with their fellow women and men were believed incapable of loving God. Those who offended their neighbours were expected to offer contrition both to God and the individuals concerned. During the

⁸¹ F. Heal, 'The Idea of Hospitality in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 102 (February 1984), pp.66-93; S. Hindle, 'Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England', *Past and Present*, 172 (August 2001), pp.44-86.

⁸² J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.138-39.

⁸³ Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p.209.

early sixteenth century exclusion from the mass was an incentive to live in peace, love, and charity. People could be barred from Communion, or might choose to stay away if they were 'not in Christian charity' with neighbours. Whether these matters significantly affected general behaviour remains unclear, but continuity of high levels of attendance at Easter communion in the allegedly disorderly suburban parishes prior to 1640 suggests that such values continued to be of importance in Protestant London. Moreover, despite the post-Reformation emphasis on formal provision of relief, voluntary charitable donations increased over the sixteenth and remained high into the early seventeenth century. Such donations were motivated by the desire of the godly for assurance of their elect status, and by the close proximity of rich and poor in the metropolis. However, both religious change and the increasingly crowded nature of London life led to greater specificity in donations, especially from women.⁸⁴

Many conduct-book authors emphasised the need for women to be charitable and hospitable. Robert Cleaver quoted the book of *Proverbs* to demonstrate that 'the vertuous woman stretcheth out her hand to the poore and needie ... She giveth not of her husbands, she giveth of her owne'. Cleaver also referred to Dorcas in the book of *Acts* as a role model who 'made garments to cloath the naked and the poore', and believed women should visit needy neighbours out of a duty of love and charity.⁸⁵ William Crompton emphasised charitable giving as an important aspect of honourable female behaviour, linking compassion for the poor and needy with religious devotion, and suggested that the preparation of salves, waters and other commodities for those in need were suitable acts of female neighbourliness.⁸⁶ Matthew Griffith stated that a

⁸⁴ S. Brigden, 'Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London', *Past and Present*, 103 (May 1984), pp.67-112; J. P. Boulton, 'The Limits of Formal Religion: The Administration of Holy Communion in late Elizabethan and early Stuart London', *London Journal*, 10:2 (1984), pp.135-54; I. W. Archer, 'The Charity of Early Modern Londoners' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 12 (2002), pp.223-42.

⁸⁵ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, pp.94-95, 229.

⁸⁶ Crompton, *Lasting Jewell*, pp.9-10; idem, *A Wedding Ring, Fitted to the Finger of every paire that have or shall meete in the feare of God* (London, 1632), pp.3-4, 10-11.

good wife was to be friendly and affable to the people her husband loved. When at table in front of guests she was to be merry and cheerful, not finding fault with her husband.⁸⁷ Daniel Rogers believed both spouses should provide ‘charity to the poore, harberousnes of strangers, reliefe of both publique causes and private persons’, but stressed that a wife should neither be so generous ‘that every one may com[e] by her commodities’ and ‘spend & spoile, to drinke & imbezel at pleasure’, nor ‘straiten the family of their due, and strangers of their hospitall welcome, for her owne pinching and base endes’. The ideal was to give what was necessary, but only what would provide honour and comfort.⁸⁸

William Gouge urged wives to give ‘kind and courteous entertainment’ to ‘kindred, alliance, acquaintance, or strangers, especially if they be saints’, and stressed that hospitality was ‘a commendable dutie belonging to such as are house-keepers and able to give entertainment’. ‘It is meet that guests should know they are welcome both to the husband and to the wife’, wrote Gouge. ‘The husband shall shew himselfe as ready and willing to entertaine his wiues friends and kindred as his owne, and so the wife her husbands’. However, while acknowledging that husbands should not overburden their wives ‘by being too ioueall ... and bringing guests too often into the house’, Gouge believed that ‘for a wife to refuse all paines in that kinde, and to be discontented when her husband invites any friends ... argueth not a loving affection, nor a wifelike subiection’. The greatest fault was for husband or wife to be ‘free and forward in entertaining their own kindred and friends’ but ‘backward, and grudge at the entertainment of each others friends and kindred’. Gouge suggested that husband and wife ought instead to encourage and aid the charitable giving of their spouse. ‘The wife ... must stirre up her husband to liberalitie in this respect, and her selfe open her hand to the poore in the things which lawfully she may give’, he

⁸⁷ Griffith, *Bethel*, p.295.

⁸⁸ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, pp.129, 293.

argued. 'Husbands and wives in distributing almes, may receive good direction one from another: the husband by telling the wife who are fit to be relieved ... the wife by telling the husband what things are fittest to be given away'.⁸⁹

At various points in the manual Gouge went into greater detail about the exact boundaries of female generosity. Gouge believed a wife was entitled to offer charity out of the goods that had been set apart to be spent, and dispose of goods without the consent of her husband that would 'bring a great good to the family, or prevent and keepe a great mischiefe from it'. Occasionally, he suggested, a wife might reasonably take greater initiative. 'If they be in great need and require present releefe, though the wife know her husband to be so hard-hearted, as he will not suffer her to releuee such an one, yet without his consent she may releeve him', Gouge argued, suggesting that certain acts of charity were at the discretion of individual female conscience. The husband was to give his wife 'something to her discretion and disposition', from which she was 'as much bound as her husband to expend something to charitable uses'. If necessary she was 'by her selfe and her friends to move her husband to grant her some libertie, that she may have some triall of her merciful and charitable disposition'. If this failed she was to tell her husband of 'such persons cases, as she thinkes meet to be relieved, and use all the motives she can to persuade him to afford them some releefe'.⁹⁰ In practice matters were not always so easy. When Arthur Goff arrived at the house of Francis Jones asking for victuals, Francis' wife welcomed Goff into the house. Jones himself was less accommodating and kicked Goff, telling him he would have no food.⁹¹

Upper middling sort and aristocratic women were most able to be charitable, and were often praised for their generosity as examples to admire and emulate.

⁸⁹ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp.261-65. Cf. p.311 where Gouge stated that a woman might not bring strangers into the house and entertain them without the consent of her husband.

⁹⁰ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, pp.292, 304.

⁹¹ OBP, 24 February 1686, t16860224-24.

Elizabeth Hoyle, wife of a York alderman, was 'making something ready' for a poor neighbour as well as providing money and alms on the morning before she died. Elizabeth told her servant not to say who was giving alms, and was acting solely for the good of the recipient, not to win any praise for herself.⁹² The people of Wells gave 'ample testimony' to the piety and charity of Margaret Ducke, and 'complained and lamented the want of her charity' after she moved to London. William Gouge described her as being 'a mother to the poore and distressed, and those that had none to help them', and her charitable inclinations stayed with her after she moved to London.⁹³ Katherine Bettergh was 'pittifull and bountifull' to the poor 'and slacked no opportunity to do good wherein shee could'. When one of the tenants fell behind with his rent she asked her husband to allow the man a quarter of a year's grace.⁹⁴ The 'liberal hand' of Lady Mary Ramsey was 'never frozen fast from Almes-deeds'. Poor children, orphans, scholars, wounded soldiers, widows, preachers, and young maids without dowries all benefited from her generosity.⁹⁵ Mary Bewley was a generous donor of alms and prompted and encouraged her husband to 'lay out some of his Estate on pious uses' so that he might 'do something that might cause the blessing of the poor to come upon him'.⁹⁶ Alexander Niccholes told how one good wife welcomed her husband's mother and father into the house and entertained them kindly with food and sustenance before offering them the marital bed.⁹⁷ In the ballad *Mans Felicity and Misery* the happy husband stated that when any of his friends came to his house his wife would entertain them freely.⁹⁸ Although Katherine Stubbes does not appear to have enjoyed much direct control over financial resources she sought to

⁹² J. Birchall, *The Non-Pareil, Or The Vertuous Daughter Surmounting all her Sisters* (York, 1614), p.18.

⁹³ Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon*, pp.25-26.

⁹⁴ *Life and Death of Mistris Katherin Bettergh*, Sig. A3v-A4r.

⁹⁵ N. Bourman, *An Epitaph on the decease of the worshipfull Lady Mary Ramsey* (London, 1603). Crompton, *Wedding Ring*, p.4 refers to generous women providing dowries for poor girls as well.

⁹⁶ Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution*, pp.11-12.

⁹⁷ A. Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving* (London, 1615), pp.45-46.

⁹⁸ 'Man's Felicity and Misery', *Pepys i*, pp.392-93.

persuade her husband to be more generous to their friends.⁹⁹ In 1631 Ann Middleton promised forty shillings each year to Allhallows the Great parish on Christmas Day, whilst the next year Cissely Rawlins bequeathed thirty pounds to the poor of the same parish, thirty pounds to repair the church, and twenty shillings for bread to be given to the poor on the day of her funeral. She also left thirty pounds for the relief, education and 'breeding upp of such poore children as are or shalbe left in the parish'. In 1654 Ann Hope left five pounds to be distributed to and amongst the parish poor.¹⁰⁰

Lower down the social order opportunities for extravagant displays of charity were naturally more limited, but some lower middling sort and plebeian women nonetheless opened their doors to strangers, albeit often for profit rather than out of charity. Taking in lodgers was a profitable business that could be incorporated easily into an economy of makeshifts, but was also an occupation in which women could show kindness and win praise. Richard Flecknoe wrote that his landlady was a 'tender soule' and one of the 'Good-wives of the City'. 'If your finger chanc'd to cut', she would apply a cobweb to the wound immediately. She cared for her lodger in other ways too, putting mouseskin on his chilblanes and kibes, making possets or caudles, and binding his head with a handkerchief before putting him to bed covered in an Irish rug and providing him with a warming-pan, close-stool and chamber-pot. 'Such was my honest Landlady [who] tenderly wept to part with me', Flecknoe wrote.¹⁰¹

Even poor London women might gain social and financial credit from taking the very poor into their homes, provided that such arrangements were approved by the parish authorities. Taking in 'penniless' inmates or pregnant women, by contrast, was viewed as an offence, not a virtue, and was frequently prosecuted because such people

⁹⁹ Stubbes, *Christall Glasse*, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ GL MS 879/1, fos. 107, 113, 221.

¹⁰¹ Flecknoe, *Diarium*, pp.36-37. The OED definition of a kibe is 'a chapped or ulcerated chilblain, especially one on the heel'.

were likely to prove a burden on the parish. Poor women were prominent in administering urban relief. Women were often responsible for the keeping, education and employment of pauper children, were employed in nursing, medicine and hospitals, in times of plague acted as searchers and took food and other necessities to quarantined houses, and offered care and housing for children, neighbours and relatives on poor relief rolls.¹⁰² Goody Millner was given three shillings by St Benet Paul's Wharf vestry for keeping Goody Gilbert a week.¹⁰³ The St Andrew Hubbard vestry gave Goodwife Goodwin sixpence per week for 'looking to' Goodwife Korder. Susan Richman was granted four shillings a week to maintain her kinswoman, the widow Berrie, whilst Goodwife Kingrose was granted twenty shillings per year for lodging Goodwife Hadly and her mother.¹⁰⁴ Widow Clinton received twenty-four shillings from St Botolph Billingsgate for keeping Any Summers for eleven weeks.¹⁰⁵ Some women also provided medical care for those they took in, a further demonstration of Christian charity and good neighbourliness.¹⁰⁶ Goodwife Robertson received sixteen pence from St Botolph Billingsgate for keeping an injured poor man in her house for ten days, whilst Allhallows Staining paid Widow Mitchell eight shillings in total for nursing a woman who had broken her leg.¹⁰⁷

Contemporary drama, however, offered frequently deeply cynical perspective on female hospitality and charity. In *Every Man in his Humour* Cob claims that his wife would lend a guest her own smock while his shirt was being washed, pawn her neckerchiefs so he has clean bands, and sell almost all the platters to buy tobacco, a depiction of excessive and thus dishonourable hospitality.¹⁰⁸ Female hospitality was

¹⁰² D. Willen, 'Women in the Public Sphere in Early Modern England: The Case of the Urban Working Poor', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19:4 (1988), pp.562-73.

¹⁰³ GL MS 877/1, fo. 155.

¹⁰⁴ GL MS 1278/1.

¹⁰⁵ GL MS 943/1, fo. 92v.

¹⁰⁶ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.48-49.

¹⁰⁷ GL MS 943/1, fo. 93v; GL MS 4957/1.

¹⁰⁸ Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*, III. iii. 47-51, p.189.

also often associated with cuckoldry. In *A Woman Killed with Kindness* Frankford asks Ann to treat Wendall with loving courtesy, and Anne replies that 'as far as modesty may well extend' it is her duty to receive him into their house. In the event she goes much further, leading to the disintegration of their marriage.¹⁰⁹ *A Trick to Catch the Old One* provides a more ambiguous depiction of attitudes to female hospitality. Dampit and Hoard claim that whilst her husband lived Widow Medler kept 'open house for all comers; horse and man was welcome, and room enough for 'em all'.¹¹⁰ Such comments were very much in line with the notion that traditional hospitality was in decline, but also imply that women could not be relied on to uphold such traditions. Disreputable connotations inherent in female hospitality are hinted at in *Bartholomew Fair* when Dame Purecraft describes herself as 'a wilful holy widow' who extracts 'feasts and gifts' from her suitors. Purecraft claims to be 'an assisting sister of the Deacons, and a devourer instead of a distributor of the alms', marrying elderly puritans and 'poor handsome young virgins' to rich widows and wealthy bachelors or widowers', making her appear something of a bawd.¹¹¹

Thomas Heywood's *The Captives* hints at hospitality as a dangerous practice that can encourage sexual infidelity, and highlights the difficulties women faced in deciding who to offer hospitality to. Ashburn's wife is sceptical about admitting Palestra and Scribonia into the house, believing her husband is attempting to smuggle in 'a couple of loose things', and her initial response is to threaten to dowse them with scalding water. However, when she realises the two women are her long-lost daughters she tells her servants to 'make fires, make ready wholesome broths, make warm the bed and see the sheets well aired'. Ashburn describes her shift in attitude to the women as being a 'strange alteration', where 'scolding is turned to pity; spleen

¹⁰⁹ T. Middleton, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (London 1607) ed. B. Scobie (London, 1991), IV, 79-83; p.22.

¹¹⁰ T. Middleton, *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (London, 1605) IV. v. 141-46 in M. Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World, My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), pp.192-93.

¹¹¹ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, V. ii. 47-55, pp.581-82.

and malice to mercy and compassion'.¹¹² *Every Man in his Humour* provides further evidence of men being unable to comprehend the problems women faced in offering hospitality. When Dame Kiteley tells Downwright that she cannot deny hospitality to her brother's friends, he tells her bluntly that she ought to have refused to let them into the house.¹¹³ Dame Kiteley's case is interesting since it reveals that women did not always have control over whom they could offer hospitality to. Married men were expected to offer hospitality to their friends, but as the fulfilment of this duty required the cooperation of their wives, the risk of cuckoldry was ever present, at least in male imaginations. Additionally, wives who were accused of cuckolding their husbands by having affairs with those to whom they had shown hospitality sometimes claimed they had been told to be civil to the men, revealing the ambiguous meanings of the term.¹¹⁴

To some extent dramatists were correct to highlight the dangers of women offering hospitality to strangers and those with whom they were little acquainted. However, the realities of living in early modern London made it almost impossible to avoid cohabiting with short-term acquaintances. Many lodgers were newcomers to the city, working in one household but living in another, and moving between residences at a fairly rapid rate. As a result misunderstandings and suspicions through the lack of privacy and overcrowding could surface even in respectable establishments, making lodging-houses problematic and potentially dangerous places for both landladies and lodgers. The behaviour of both parties was closely observed and commented upon, especially if either side transgressed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Often landlords and landladies accused lodgers of whoredom and 'dishonesting' their houses.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Heywood, *Captives*, IV. i. 127-39, 342-43, 355-57 in Merchant (ed.) *Thomas Heywood*, pp.237, 243.

¹¹³ B. Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour* (London, 1598), IV. i. 3-4, 12-14, in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.192.

¹¹⁴ Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.127-29.

¹¹⁵ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.36-38; id., 'The Poet and the Bawdy Court: Michael Drayton and the Lodging-House World in Early Stuart London', *The Seventeenth Century*, 10:1 (Spring 1995), pp.27-

Many lodgers stole from their landladies and were willing to go to significant lengths to obtain the property they desired. One woman was tried at the Old Bailey for 'taking a lodging by a wrong name' and stealing several clothes when her landlady was absent.¹¹⁶ Mistress Jewers was a widow 'near Fourscore years of Age' who lived alone in Angel Alley near the bars without Bishopsgate. Jewers let out half her house to an ale-seller and also took in lodgers, including a man and woman 'who pretended to be man and wife' and who were 'strangers to her and all the neighbours'. One evening the couple invited their landlady up to their room to share a meal of pork with them, and used the opportunity to murder and rob the elderly woman. The story was retold in a murder pamphlet to warn 'all honest house-keepers, to be more wary in entertaining Lodgers, without sufficient Testimonials of their Integrity'.¹¹⁷ Even lodging relations could prove dangerous. Thomas Fallofield killed his cousin Mary Hunt despite the fact she had been 'very kindly and in a friendly manner entertained [Thomas] both with meat, drink, and lodging'.¹¹⁸ Even if the mistress of the house sought to keep out unwanted visitors servants might let in undesirable individuals. Winifred Robinson was said to have let Sara Berry and some young gentlemen into her mistress's house at midnight, where she lodged them.¹¹⁹ Winifred's actions were deeply problematic since allowing strangers into the house at night invited robbery, damage to the property, and the risk of the inhabitants being physically or sexually assaulted.

Landladies as well as lodgers might face criticism over their behaviour. In the summer of 1638 Elizabeth Pecke was drinking with her husband George and a group of women in the St. John of Jerusalem tavern in St. James, Clerkenwell, when a Mrs

37; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.22-23; id. "'The freedom of the streets': women and social space, 1560-1640" in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), p.136.

¹¹⁶ OBP, 16 January 1678, t16780116-10.

¹¹⁷ *Bloody and Barbarous News From Bishopsgate-Street* (London, 1678), pp.4-8.

¹¹⁸ OBP, 25 February 1685, t16850225-18.

¹¹⁹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*, p.48.

Sherlocke asked Elizabeth how she liked the lodger she had recommended. Elizabeth said that she liked her, and Mrs Sherlocke commented that she hoped Elizabeth would recommend a lodger to her in return at some future time. At this point one Mrs Mills interjected, and told Mrs Sherlocke that 'you do not deserve any lodgers for you beat them', claiming that Mrs Sherlocke had shaken and beaten a young woman who lately lodged in her house, an action allegedly observed by two or three credible witnesses. Mrs Sherlocke responded by claiming that Mrs Mills 'a base unworthy woman and noe Christian' and the conversation descended into a series of defamatory insults.¹²⁰ Hester Bird was indicted and found guilty of robbing her lodger, Alderman Sturt, of a gold watch, some silver lace, and several parcels of money by using a false key.¹²¹ These incidents reveal that taking in lodgers could profit women financially through the money they brought in, and earn them social credit as a kind of 'female authority figure'. A landlady wielded authority over younger and poorer lodgers, and taking in gentleman lodgers could bring reflected glory on her as she had members of the social elite under her roof. However, taking in lodgers also made landladies subject to great scrutiny and vulnerable to certain dangers. Lodgers might steal from houses, or use the premises for immoral or illegal activities. Equally some landladies stole from or cheated their lodgers. Neighbours took a great deal of notice in the new inhabitants and the nature of their interactions with those from whom they were renting living-space, and if anything untoward occurred they were quick to bring it to the attention of the local community.

Women who took in lodgers could face accusations of sexual misdemeanours as well as those relating to violence. One bawdy jest referred to a vintner's daughter 'that let out her fore-Rooms, and lay backward'.¹²² Mary Homes deposed that John

¹²⁰ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 164r-167v.

¹²¹ OBP, 26 April 1682, t16820426-17.

¹²² *London Jests*, p.37; Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.88.

Pears had lodged with her mistress Elizabeth Dudley on diverse occasions, and how she had seen them in bed together.¹²³ The relationship between John Lowell and his landlady Lydia Powell was subject to much controversy. Francis Ireland told John that he was a knave 'and that the said Lovell and the said Powell did eat and drinke together and that he was upon the said Powells bed'. Ireland's wife also confronted Lydia. 'I am sure you eate together and you drink together and you lie together what is he but your knave', she demanded.¹²⁴ Relationships between men and women in the capital were often fluid, shifting from being co-servants to master and servant or husband and wife, so it was not inconceivable that landlady and lodger might become something more. Additionally eating and drinking together signified not only hospitality, but intimacy, making their actions ambiguous.¹²⁵ Such ambiguities enabled gossip and rumour to turn hospitality and sociability into something more problematic. 'Entertaining' company could also carry connotations of promiscuity and prostitution. Helen Norrys was accused of entertaining persons of ill fame and keeping ill order in the house of her husband Robert in Saint John's Street. Emma Robinson was rumoured to be 'a notorious Common Queane' who sat at her door between eleven and twelve o'clock at night 'to entertaine lewde persons that resort unto her'.¹²⁶

The church courts were concerned with actual sexual offenders, including pregnant single women, but also with bawds, harbourers and receivers of such people.¹²⁷ Thomas Maddy believed a whore or a prostitute was being harboured in a private house when he alleged a man called Saxton was lodging a woman, and 'rayled

¹²³ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 13v.

¹²⁴ LMA DL/C/235, fos. 134r-138v.

¹²⁵ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.163-64. For an example of married servants in the same London household see Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, p.228.

¹²⁶ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, p.69; Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*, p.47.

¹²⁷ M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.282-91.

upon him and openly in the street exclaimed that the plague was in his howse'.¹²⁸ As with company-keeping, whom women allowed into their houses affected their reputations. Bastard-bearers, prostitutes, criminals and vagrants were prominent groups of people women were brought before the Middlesex sessions for harbouring. Ann Bagley of St John Street was accused of being 'a common harbourer of great-bellied women'. Ann Marrcroft of St. Sepulchre's was accused of 'suffering a lewd woman to be brought to bed of a bastard child, and causing it to be christened in the house, and the child to be buried in another parish, and all in secret'. Elizabeth Northall, a Clerkenwell spinster, allowed a bastard to be born and christened in her house. Alice Whitehead, a widow of Poplar, was charged with 'receiving a strange woman, great with child by Robert Deloe, to be brought to bed in her house'. Mary Cawson of Whitecross Street, St. Giles' was accused of harbouring whores in her house and other misdemeanours. Ann Marcroft confessed to keeping a bawdy house and 'bringing half a dozen whores to bed in her house at once'. Alice Wyber of Whitechapel was 'a usual lodger of suspected persons and lewd people'. Elizabeth Dunn, a Stepney widow, was said to harbour rogues and idle and disordered people. Mary Richardson was charged with harbouring thieves and Mary Jones, a Clerkenwell widow, with being a common harbourer of rogues. Philippa Teddar of St. John Street harboured common cutpurses.¹²⁹

The behaviour of women who harboured such people can be read in different ways. The collective reputations of local communities mattered greatly to both men and women, many of whom subjected their neighbours to intense scrutiny, prompted by self-interest, moral principle, and curiosity. Parish authorities disapproved of any such behaviour, perceiving those who harboured whores and vagrants as little better

¹²⁸ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, p.211.

¹²⁹ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, pp. 8, 428, 437, 438 (bastard-bearers); 89, 186, 379 (whores and prostitutes); 52, 79, 85, 402 (rogues and idle vagrants).

than the individuals they took in, and viewing them either as opportunists seeking to profit by helping dishonourable women get rid of unwanted children, or as assistants of petty criminals. However, those who harboured socially marginal figures might have perceived matters differently. They were often kin to the single mothers and vagrants, or kind-hearted individuals who took pity on pregnant single women with nowhere else to turn, and providing food and lodging for those without nourishment or shelter.¹³⁰ If neighbours were in need, taking them into one's home was deemed unquestionably to be the correct course of action. When Edward Abraham deposed before the church courts he described how Ralf Pollard had beaten and misused his wife Judith in the middle of the night, and how even though Judith was pregnant Ralf had 'thrust hir out of his house willing her to go shifte for her self'. Edward had risen from his bed, and together with other neighbours called for Ralf to let Judith back into the house. When Ralf refused Judith was forced to rely on the hospitality of Margaret Jones, one of the neighbours.¹³¹ Similarly Mary Watson, married to a violent weaver, took refuge with neighbours one night whilst other locals kept him at bay.¹³²

Depending on the financial resources of their households, the virtues of charity and hospitality were aspirations women could realise with relative ease. However, the fulfilment of such ideals was problematic because it might entail women allowing strangers into their homes, leading to accusations of dishonesty and leaving them vulnerable to potential physical violence and sexual abuse. Harboring those on the margins of society ought in theory to have won praise as the behaviour of a good Christian, but in practice it was often condemned as harbouring those beyond the pale of reputable society. As with many aspects of neighbourliness, the limits of charity and hospitality were a matter of individual opinion.

¹³⁰ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.269, 370.

¹³¹ GL MS 9056, fos. 17r-v, 19r-v.

¹³² Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.107.

Drinking and female sociability

As will have become evident from much of the evidence presented thus far, drinking was a key component of early modern sociability. However, like so many aspects of sociability, consuming alcohol was not unproblematic for women. Ester Sowernam wrote of a double standard regarding women and drinking. ‘What an hatefull thing it is to see a woman overcome with drinke, when as in men it is noted a signe of good fellowship’, she complained. ‘For one woman which doth make a custome of drunkenesse, you shall finde an hundred men: it is abhorred in women, and therefore they avoyd it: it is laughed at and made but as a jest amongst men, and therefore so many doe practice it’.¹³³ The final section of this chapter outlines the diverse attitudes towards women drinkers, and defines under what circumstances it was acceptable for women to drink.

All medieval and early modern men, women, and children consumed alcohol of varying strengths since water was often polluted and milk reserved for producing butter and cheese. In England ale was the traditional popular beverage and alcohol comprised a large part of the average person’s calorie intake. Drinking together both on an everyday basis and on special occasions also aided social cohesion, integration, and communal solidarity. Yet extreme drinking could result in antisocial behaviour, and it was commonly known that tippling might lead to sexual aggression or violence.¹³⁴ The effects of drinking were believed to depend on what was being consumed, and the drinker’s age, gender, health, and temperament. Many considered moderate drinking and even intoxication to be beneficial, with alcohol consumption

¹³³ E. Sowernam, *Ester hath hang’d Haman: Or An Answere to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignment of Women* (London, 1617), p.24. On drinking and male honour see Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.40-41; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, pp.100-06, 111-14; A. Shepard, “‘Swil-bols and Tos-pots’: Drink Culture and Male Bonding in England, c.1560-1640’ in L. Gowing, M. Hunter and M. Rubin (eds.), *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp.110-130.

¹³⁴ A. L. Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp.1-6; J. M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women’s Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford, 1996), pp.16-17. James Brown, Beat Kümin, Angela McShane-Jones, and Phil Withington are all currently researching aspects of early modern drinking cultures.

only sinful if it resulted in physical harm or the loss of conscience or self-discipline. Therefore the motives for drinking and frequency of intoxication affected perceptions of the behaviour of the individual drinker. Drunkenness was thus an ambiguous state that in men could be either celebrated or condemned. However, in women drinking was to be restricted. Following the logic of classical medicine heavy alcohol consumption was believed to unbalance the humours, transforming women into men, and was also associated with female sexual lascivious, prostitution, witchcraft, and the mismanagement of household resources.¹³⁵ Connections between drunkenness and other forms of unruly female behaviour make it clear that concerns about excessive drinking were shaped by the damage that could be inflicted by the drunkard on her or his household and community.¹³⁶

Evidence of misogynistic attitudes to female drinking in early modern society is easy to find. John Skelton, whose work was reprinted in the seventeenth century, commented derogatorily on the female customers at the alehouse of Elenor Rummyng, claiming they would pledge assorted items, even their spinning wheels, needles, thimbles, 'beanes and pease' and 'a good brasse pan', to get the drink they craved.¹³⁷ In *Newes from the New Exchange* Henry Neville claimed there was a time when women 'were constrained to converse only with their homes and closets', when 'there was no such thing as the servant, the friend, or the intimate in ordinary' and that women had not dared 'to be acquainted with the mode of Drinke, Dice, and Tobacco'. By the mid-seventeenth century, Neville believed, the situation had altered, and hard-drinking women would 'convert their smocks into Colinders to strain healths of Sack into Beer-glasses, and take them off astride upon mens shoulders'.¹³⁸ *A Bachelors*

¹³⁵ B. A. Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order: the culture of drink in early modern Germany* (Charlottesville, 2001), pp.48-78, 133-38.

¹³⁶ B. A. Tlusty, 'Drinking, Family Relations, and Authority in Early Modern Germany', *Journal of Family History*, 29:3 (July 2004), p.254.

¹³⁷ Skelton, *Elynor Rummin*, Sig. B2v.

¹³⁸ H. Neville, *Newes from the New Exchange, Or the Commonwealth of Ladies, Drawn to the Life, in their severall Characters and Concernments* (London, 1650), pp.1-3.

Resolution deemed 'a drunken sot' to be the worst sort of wife for she would make her husband drink small beer whilst she would 'drinke the stronger'.¹³⁹

Homilies, sermons and conduct books generally recognised that drunkenness was principally a male phenomenon. *The Homily against Gluttony and Drunkenness* focussed on male drinkers, describing the damage excessive alcohol consumption could do to the body and citing biblical and classical examples lining drunkenness with sexual promiscuity, insanity, violence and loss of authority and neighbourhood respect. By contrast women were depicted as victims of male drunkenness, being railed at, sexually assaulted, or reduced to poverty by drunken men.¹⁴⁰ The Elizabethan homily on matrimony deemed drunken wives to be 'beastly, without wit and reason', but told good husbands to bear with such women and reform them.¹⁴¹

Other clerical writers displayed a far more hostile attitude to women drinking. William Crompton wrote derogatorily of drunken gossips, and noted that a woman's diet should be 'neither carelesse, curious, or excessive in meate or drinke'.¹⁴² Daniel Rogers complained of women's 'luxuriousness, riotous and lewde companionship' and of meetings of 'Women-drinkers, Tobacconists and swaggerers'.¹⁴³ Matthew Griffith wrote of 'some sottish old women ... rather sponges, then women, they are such immoderate soakers; and take in the wine so long, till they let out their own wits'. Griffith argued that young women should be taught how to be sober rather than how to 'be jovial, eat, and drinke, and laugh', and denounced weddings as occasions when women told 'bawdy jests', encouraged each other's pride and drank healths 'so long till they lost it', urging each other 'to drinke by measure, out of measure'. Older

¹³⁹ 'A Bachelors Resolution', *Pepys i*, p.233.

¹⁴⁰ *An Homily Against Gluttony and Drunkenness in Sermons or Homilies, appointed to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London, 1817), pp.273-82.

¹⁴¹ *An Homily Of The State Of Matrimony in Sermons or Homilies, appointed to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London, 1817), pp.481-82.

¹⁴² Crompton, *Lasting Jewell*, p.29.

¹⁴³ Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour*, p.290. Rogers would have intended 'tobacconist' to mean 'a person addicted to the use of tobacco; esp. a habitual tobacco-smoker' (OED).

women were to encourage sobriety in the young, which Griffith believed would bring credit and honour for their sex.¹⁴⁴ Thomas Hilder echoed Griffith's association of female sociability with improper humour and denounced young women in particular for 'the levity of their minds, they being apt above others to close with vaine pleasures, and so more likely to neglect their maine duty to their husbands'.¹⁴⁵ Jane Sharp attempted to define the limits of what women could drink, describing the signs that women should look for if they felt they had drunk too much, and explaining that 'the causes of great eating and drinking beyond the bounds of nature, are the liquorish appetite and a fancy beyond reason'. 'It is easy to know when you have eat or drank too much, or what agrees not with you; when you find nature changed with it, and is not able to digest it, vapours rising from the stomach that is glutted will choak the brain, and cause defluxions and multitudes of diseases: if you be sleepy after meat and drink, you have taken too much'.¹⁴⁶ Drinking was central to rituals of childbirth and was believed to have medicinal benefits, particularly regarding fertility, although how much was to be consumed and in what form was open to debate.¹⁴⁷

Most of the attitudes Samuel Pepys displayed to female drinkers in his diary were critical of excessive female drinking. Pepys was concerned when he visited his young ward Mrs Jem in January 1660 and found her 'hot and merry', suspecting the servants had given her wine. Such concerns probably stemmed from the age of the girl and the fact Pepys knew he was responsible for her welfare. Similarly, the attitudes he displayed towards the drinking habits of his servants were conditioned by his position as a patriarchal household head and the age of the women concerned. Samuel was shocked to discover that one of his previous maidservants, Sarah, had

¹⁴⁴ Griffith, *Bethel*, pp.131, 140, 141, 279.

¹⁴⁵ Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell*, p.95.

¹⁴⁶ J. Sharp, *The Midwives Book: Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered*, edited by E. Hobby (Oxford, 1999), pp.72-73.

¹⁴⁷ L. H. Curth, 'The Medicinal Value of Wine in Early Modern England', *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, 18 (2003), pp.35-50; Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender*, pp.25-27, 42-45, 80-81; Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order*, p.55.

become 'a great drunkard, which I am ashamed of'. The comment illustrates that the manner in which a woman drank impacted not only on her own credit, reputation and honesty, but also those she lived and worked with. The following year Pepys explained that Sarah had been 'taught to drink' and 'gets out of doors two or three times a day without leave to the alehouse'. Due to her drinking and alehouse-gadding Sarah fell out with her new mistress. Sarah claimed she ventured forth 'to warm herself', but her mistress did not believe her and turned her out of doors. 'And so she is gone like an idle slut', Samuel remarked. Sarah was not the only domestic servant who enjoyed tippling. In 1667 Pepys was 'vexed with our maid Luce, our cook maid, who is a good drudging servant in everything else and pleases us, but that she will be drunk, and hath been so last night and all this day, that she could not make clean the house'. A couple of months later he came home to find Luce drunk again, and on this occasion her behaviour led to her dismissal.¹⁴⁸ The question of how widespread excessive drinking was amongst domestic servants would be worth exploring further, since alcohol often provided the sole refuge and comfort from the harshness of daily life for many early modern people.¹⁴⁹ Considering the drudgery of their work, and their vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse, it would be unsurprising to find that many servants resorted to alcohol as a source of solace.

Excessive drinking by women was believed to result in the loss of self-control, and hence sexual promiscuity. Some women made a conscious decision to become intoxicated, but at other times men, women, and even parents desired to make women drunk in order for them to be abused sexually.¹⁵⁰ Unanticipated pregnancy was one potential result of heavy drinking for women. One of *Poor Robin's Jests* told of a maid 'who had taken too much of the Bottle' and visited a physician to discover the

¹⁴⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 31 January 1660, i, p.34; 22 December 1662, iii, p.288; 24 May 1663, iv, p.154; 23 March 1667; 18 May 1667, viii, pp.126, 221-22.

¹⁴⁹ Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender*, pp.3-4.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender*, pp.38, 83-87.

reason for her sickness. The doctor told her to be cheerful and that ‘within these few months you shall have the cause of your grief in your arms’.¹⁵¹ Drinking was also linked with prostitution. Elizabeth Browne and Mary Cole, both nightwalkers, were brought before the Bridewell governors for ‘enticinge the Constable being alone to goe drinke’.¹⁵² When Joane Averie called Mrs Fuller a drunken whore and Priscilla Hayton called Ellen Stone ‘drunken slutt and pisspot slut’ both women connected drinking with established ideas of female dishonour in the form of whoredom and leaky female bodies.¹⁵³ Defamation cases show that female drunkards were generally regarded with contempt, and associated with animals, filth, and prostitution. When Francis Rayden defamed Mary Crookes by calling her a drunken beast, Mary replied that ‘I was never soe drunke that ever I was brought home in a coach as you were [and] ... I never pissed in a mans hat and flung it out of the window as thou diddest’.¹⁵⁴ Mary Sermon called the woman she was arguing with ‘Hussy or Impudence’ and told her not to speak with her, but to ‘the drunken crew’ in Bridewell, before asserting, ‘I was never found drunk at two of ye clock in ye morning with my coates over my head’.¹⁵⁵

When Mr Birde, a Southwark brewer, asked Joane Clement ‘diverse times’ to have the use of her body he promised in return that ‘he wold please her well and give her good chere’.¹⁵⁶ The phrase is ambiguous but ‘good chere’ would likely have included some form of drink. *Laugh and Lie Down* told of a girl who went ‘reeling away’ after having sex in exchange for ‘a goodly black hood and a gallant serge gown’.¹⁵⁷ Other ballads claimed that whores forced the men they associated with to

¹⁵¹ Anon, *Poor Robin's Jests*, p.61.

¹⁵² GL MS 33011/9, fo. 7.

¹⁵³ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 8r; LMA DL/C/235, fo. 316v.

¹⁵⁴ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 69r; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.195.

¹⁵⁵ Earle, *City Full of People*, p.219.

¹⁵⁶ GL MS 33011/3, fo. 5r.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Laugh and lie Down: Or, A Dialogue’, *Pepys iii*, p.35.

send for wine, and were able to 'put me[n] downe in drinking'.¹⁵⁸ 'As the hop well boiled will make a man not stand upon his legs so the harlot in time will leave a man no legs to stand upon' was a proverb recited in the induction to *Michaelmas Term* and in *The Academy of Pleasure*.¹⁵⁹ In *Bartholomew Fair* Ursula claims that Jordan Knockem is 'one of those horseleeches, that gave out I was dead in Turnbull Street, of a surfeit of bottle ale and tripes', placing her in one of the most notorious districts of the early modern metropolis.¹⁶⁰

However, the dishonourable associations of female drunkenness did not relate only to sexual promiscuity; they also involved disturbing the neighbourhood peace by scolding, swearing, cross-dressing, urinating in unsuitable places, and perpetrating minor acts of violence against individuals and property. Lynn Martin has suggested that to some extent men viewed female drinkers in a negative light because they were empowered and did not conform to patriarchal expectations.¹⁶¹ Shortly after the Great Fire Pepys observed 'how hard the women did work in the canals sweeping of water', and how 'they would scold for drink and be drunk as devils'.¹⁶² One jest described 'a Woman that had acquired the Reputation of out-scolding Billingsgate, drowning the Noise of Bow-Bell, and making more Harmony than fourteen Midwives, when they are half-Drunk'.¹⁶³ George Morris deposed that when he had 'bynne in ye company' of Joane Nevill she had been 'overcome with drink, at which time she behaveth herself very idle and lewdly and will openly and in very unseemly manner rayle at her neighbours that dwell neer unto her'. Richard Kilbey reported similarly that 'in her drunkenness' Joane did 'much profane the name of god by using wicked and blasphemous oaths and discourse' and would 'speake of ribauldry and obscene and

¹⁵⁸ 'A Caueat or Warning. For all Sortes of Men', *Pepys* i, p.46; 'Here is an Item for you. Or, the Countrimans bill of charges, for his coming up to London declared by a Whistle', *Pepys* i, p.202.

¹⁵⁹ Middleton, *Michaelmas Term*, Induction, 18-20, p.69; Anon, *Academy of Pleasure*, p.33.

¹⁶⁰ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, II. iii. 13-14, p.519.

¹⁶¹ Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender*, pp.104-08.

¹⁶² Pepys, *Diary*, 6 September 1666, vii, p.278.

¹⁶³ *London Jests*, p.75.

base things in very lewd and uncivll fashion'.¹⁶⁴ Drunkenness was also associated with lack of financial credit. When Alice Walker came before the Bridewell governors she was described as 'a common cosener and drunkard'.¹⁶⁵ Female drunkenness endangered women themselves as well as those around them. When John Richardson was indicted for beating his wife Martha to death he claimed she had been drunk at the time and had fallen down, an unlikely story considering the severity of her injuries. Mary MacDonald's mother gave evidence against Hugh Evie, accusing him of getting her daughter drunk and raping her.¹⁶⁶

However at other times female drunkards were an inconvenience rather than a danger. Samuel Pepys was scathing about Mary Harper, whom he described talking foolishly about her son, James, when she was drunk one evening, but he regarded her as a nuisance not a threat.¹⁶⁷ Gregory Phillipot claimed Suzan May was taken and reputed to be 'of very lewd life and conversation', and that he had seen her 'overcome with drink in a very unseemly fashion' when she had been 'in several men's companies misbehaving her self'. Elizabeth Chamberlaine deposed that William Aylmer had reported to her how he had found Anne Burford 'drunk upon ye bench and had much ado to wake her'.¹⁶⁸ When Blanche Howell returned home 'with some extraordinary behaviour and her face red' her fellow maidservant Susan More 'perceived she had been drinking wine'.¹⁶⁹ Heavy drinking was deemed by some to be a folly of youth in women as well as men, a stage of life that young women would grow out of. In *Michaelmas Term* Thomasine hopes 'she'll be ruled in time, though she be foolish yet, and not be carried away with a cast of manchets, a bottle of wine,

¹⁶⁴ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 9r, 12v.

¹⁶⁵ GL MS 33011/4, fo. 75v.

¹⁶⁶ OBP, 3 September 1684, t16840903-22; OBP, 31 May 1688, t16880531-26.

¹⁶⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 9 March 1660, i, p.84.

¹⁶⁸ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 111r, 144v.

¹⁶⁹ LMA DL/C/218, fo. 138 in P. Crawford and L. Gowing (eds.), *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 2000), p.146.

or a custard'.¹⁷⁰ However, this was very much a minority view, and overall women were given far less leeway in their drinking behaviour than men.

Women often defined their respectability by differentiating themselves from female drinkers, accusing them of neglecting their household duties as mistresses, wives, and mothers.¹⁷¹ *A Fooles Bolt is Soon Shot* mocked the hard-working husband who returned home to find he could not enter his house because his wife, who did 'drinke and spend all' had 'gone to play'.¹⁷² One Wapping man was unable to live with his wife because of her addiction to 'strong waters' and frequent drunkenness, and she had to be kept abroad at his charge.¹⁷³ On other occasions the outcome of heavy drinking by women could be fatal to other members of their households. Elizabeth Wollman murdered her husband's apprentice, John Bret, when she was intoxicated, having been at an alehouse adjoining her home. Elizabeth spotted Bret playing with her son and threw an empty bag at him, which missed. She went home in a rage and returned with a broomstick, which she used to beat Bret, before taking up a chisel and striking it into his breast.¹⁷⁴

The tragic story of Sarah Elstone would have confirmed the received wisdom that excessive female drinking threatened the total ruin and destruction of a family. Sarah lived 'in Three-Faulken-Court over against St Margarets-hill in Southwark' with her husband Thomas. The couple lived contentedly for many years, with Sarah assisting Thomas in the felt-making trade 'in what she was able'. However, Sarah fell into 'the acquaintance of some lewd women' and began drinking heavily. 'After a little practising of it she became hardened to' drinking and 'learn'd to swear by her Maker, and to prophain the Lords Day, and hate good men'. Several acquaintances of her husband noticed a change in her behaviour and 'desired him to do all that he could

¹⁷⁰ Middleton, *Michaelmas Term*, II. iii. 17-19, p.88.

¹⁷¹ Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order*, p.144.

¹⁷² 'A Fooles Bolt is Soone Shot', *Pepys* i, p.179.

¹⁷³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.83-84.

¹⁷⁴ OBP, 16 January 1682, u16820116a-6.

to reclaim her, telling him also that it was his duty'. Thomas 'hoped God would turn her from these evil courses, but he for his part could do no good with her, for she was so obstinate, that the more he said to her the worse she was'. When Thomas realised that 'he could not prevail by fair means', he sought to deprive Sarah of money, 'but then she ran him in debt, and took up money at the Tally-shops'. Thomas told those who had loaned her money that 'if they trusted her any more he would not pay them: upon which she resolved of another way, which was to sell her goods, which she did by degrees, till they had scarce a Chair to sit on, or a bed to lye on'. Thomas became so angered by this that he resolved to beat Sarah to force her to stop drinking. Their arguments meant their neighbours were forced to part them 'at all hours in the night'. One evening Sarah had been out with her gossips and came home drunk to find Thomas at work. She told him that if he would not give her some money she would 'be the Death of him'. Seeing her in such a drunken state Thomas took Sarah and thrust her downstairs, shut the door, and returned to his work. 'When he thought her heat was over' Thomas went down, intending to drink, and met Sarah at the foot of the stairs carrying a pair of shears. She stabbed him in the breast, killing him instantly.¹⁷⁵

Episodes such as this were exceptional, and contemporaries recognised that social drinking could have a positive dimension for women as well as men, providing them with opportunities for sociability and gossip, and playing important roles at each stage of courtship and betrothal.¹⁷⁶ Samuel Pepys recorded many instances of women drinking liberally, and despite often being critical of female drinking could sometimes take a more positive view. 'I wondered to see how the ladies did tipple', he remarked on the day of the progress of Charles II into Whitehall. When Pepys observed Mrs

¹⁷⁵ *Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone at the place of execution who was burned for killing her husband, April 24. 1678* (London, 1678), pp.2-3.

¹⁷⁶ Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender*, pp.51-57.

Shipman filling a piecrust with white wine ('it holding at least a pint and a half') and drinking it as a health his reaction was a combination of astonishment and admiration, describing it as 'the greatest draught that ever I did see a woman drink in my life'. On an equally sociable, but more polite occasion Pepys described a pleasant evening he spent with Mrs Crisp's daughter and some of her friends drinking at Mrs Harper's house.¹⁷⁷ The heroine of *The Country Lasse* told how 'at Christmas time in mirth and glee I dance with young men neatly' and indulged in 'a cup of Christmas liquor'.¹⁷⁸ Even after death women could use drink to enforce ties of communal sociability and win posthumous credit. Widow Foulks informed her executors to make a drinking amongst her neighbours and to bestow what they pleased from her estate on the parish poor.¹⁷⁹

For many women, calculating how to engage in the drinking cultures of early modern London respectably was undoubtedly problematic. Yet not all women felt constrained by the strictures of patriarchy or respectability. Shortly before Midsummer's Day 1633 John Hall went with one Mr Holloway to *The George*, a victualling house in Smithfields in St Sepulchres parish. Eleanor Meade was in *The George* talking to the wife of the owner, Peter Hallewill, about 'fallings out' between her and Holloway. As Hall and Holloway sat down in a low room next to the street and began drinking Eleanor came over and sat at a little table opposite them. She spoke with Holloway about various matters over which they had fallen out, specifically a derogatory allegation that Eleanor had made against Holloway's wife. The pair laid a wager of six shillings each concerning such words as had allegedly passed between them and John Hall requested that Eleanor sit down to drink with them so that she and Holloway should be friends. Holloway took a can of beer and

¹⁷⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 23 April 1661, ii, p.87; 3 February 1662, iii, p.22; 20 August 1660, i, pp.225-26.

¹⁷⁸ 'The Countrey Lasse', *Pepys* i, p.268.

¹⁷⁹ V. Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations' in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. E. Wrightson (eds.), *The World we have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford, 1986), p.150.

drank to Eleanor and offered her the can to pledge him in return. Eleanor refused and said that she would call for her own can of beer to offer a pledge, and that 'if she had in mind a drink she had i d in her purse to call for a pot of beere as well as they and did call for her pott and that being drunk she would have been gone'. At this point the owner's wife intervened, asking Eleanor to stay and drink with Holloway. Eleanor pointed out that there was no drink, so Holloway sent for two more cans. Eleanor took one and told both Hallewill's wife and Holloway that she would drink to him, 'but not to flatter with him or curry favour with him'. After the pair drank together John Hall reported that they appeared to be good friends, but Peter Hallewill was unsure if they had parted on such amicable terms.¹⁸⁰

This incident is interesting in many ways. Although there is no reference to Eleanor going to the victualling house with any companions, female or male, the fact that she knew the owner and his wife meant she was probably assured of a friendly welcome. Eleanor appears to have regarded her male drinking companions as equals, laying wagers with them, pledging them, and boasting that she was as able to buy her own alcohol as they were, the latter an action that was associated with male honour and 'right living'.¹⁸¹ Although her behaviour does not appear to have been typical it suggests nonetheless that some women who drank in early modern public houses were able to hold their own and be accepted as near equals by their male drinkers.

Despite the copious negative connotations attached to drinking, women often felt comfortable consuming alcohol, and doubtless found it a pleasurable experience that enlivened everyday life and specific social occasions. But maintenance of control of the body was important as excessive drinking was linked with female vices of sexual promiscuity and scolding; too much alcohol risked opening female bodies in

¹⁸⁰ GL MS 9057/1, fos. 29r-33v. The allegation was that Holloway's wife was not fit to wash Eleanor's floors and is referred to above in Chapter 4.

¹⁸¹ Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order*, p.1.

many disreputable ways. Age also played a role in defining the acceptability of female drinking behaviour. Drinking was to be discouraged among young single women as the illicit sex and unwanted pregnancy that might result from intoxication could not be concealed as easily, and would thus damage their credit to a greater extent than they would for married women.

Conclusion

Women were expected to conform to the values of neighbourliness and sociability as much as men, but their ability to fulfil such roles was hedged by greater restrictions. Whilst company and civility carried purely positive connotations for men, for women they could have connotations of bawdry and whoredom that made them difficult to negotiate. Similarly hospitality and charity were praiseworthy virtues, but as they involved women opening their households to strangers, there were risks involving damage to women's physical bodies and reputations that always had to be borne in mind. Drinking could make women too open as well, but its value as a drug and social lubricant made it difficult to resist. Good neighbourliness, hospitality, and charity were all generally accepted as commendable female virtues, but respectable women knew they had to be negotiated with care. A good name was far easier to lose than to gain. 'Moderation', always the burden of conduct books, was far more than platitudinous advice; it was essential if women were to negotiate safely a patriarchal and often misogynist culture.

6. Women and the Negotiation of Metropolitan Space

Introduction

In December 1662 Samuel Pepys was vexed to discover that rumours were circulating that his wife Elizabeth 'did go every day in the week to Court and plays, and that she should have liberty of going abroad as often as she pleased'.¹ Pepys may have been anxious that his patriarchal authority as a husband was being undermined by claims that he was unable to restrict the mobility of his wife, but he would also have been aware that when Elizabeth went abroad she ventured into the largest, most intriguing, and most dangerous city in England. A generation earlier the pamphleteer Henry Goodcole had sought to warn women of the perils of the capital when he described the downfall of Elizabeth Evans, born in Shropshire of good parents and well educated, who was sent to London where some friends found her work in service. Despite this promising start Elizabeth soon became acquainted with a young man 'who tempted her into folly'. They frequented 'playhouses, taverns, inns, alehouses, the open streets, and the fields', before he left her 'out of all credit, friends, money, apparrell, and service'.²

Pepys and Goodcole shared a concern about women venturing alone around London. As early modern Englishmen they were accustomed to associating women with a private and domestic female realm, notions of which originated in the writings of classical writers such as Aristotle, and were long established by the sixteenth century. Clerical conduct literature suggested that respectable women focus their attention on household affairs, and not go abroad without good reason. Robert Cleaver believed the ideal wife was 'not a street-wife, one that gaddeth up and downe ... nor a field-wife ... but a house-wife: to shew that a good wife keeps her house',

¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 8 December 1662, iii, p.277.

² H. Goodcole, *Heavens Speedie Hue and Cry sent after Lust and Murther* (London, 1635), Sig. Br.

and contrasted this female paragon with Solomon's description in the *Book of Kings* of the whore standing 'at the doore, now sitting upon her stall, now walking in the streetes, now looking out of the window'.³ Similarly Matthew Griffith warned that a good woman should be neither a 'field-wife' nor a 'street-wife'.⁴

Such models were impossible to enforce and difficult for women to achieve. Recent historiography has criticised the conceptual utility of separate spheres as a means of thinking about gender and space. Amanda Vickery has argued that women were involved to some degree in both public and private arenas from the start of the thirteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries.⁵ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford suggested that women created their own cultures by demarcating and controlling their own spaces. As part of their daily routines plebeian women needed to visit and work in markets, shops and bake-houses, and fetch water from a well or river. When female concerns were at stake, such as in childbirth, women constructed private spaces to exclude men. Moreover, they exercised some degree of spatial and cultural dominance in certain arenas, notably household and neighbourhood, moving between interior and exterior spaces relatively easily. Cramped conditions of urban living meant that even women who remained inside household boundaries could be aware of daily life beyond their domestic environments by standing in doorways, peering through windows, and listening through walls. The enclosure of women was unrealistic during daylight hours since in many cases their work was needed to support the domestic economy and necessitated them working outside the household. However, women were not safe in either internal or external spaces, and male and female spaces were contested constantly. Alehouses, streets, and fields were

³ R. Cleaver, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* (London, 1598), pp.223-24.

⁴ M. Griffith, *Bethel: Or A Forme for Families* (London, 1633), p.414.

⁵ A. Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history' in P. Sharpe (ed.), *Women's Work: The English Experience 1650-1914* (London, 1998), pp.294-332.

problematic locations for women, especially if they were alone, and after dark all outdoor spaces became dangerous and disreputable.⁶

London women walked the streets, worked as hawkers and pedlars, pursued various leisure activities, and often castigated the misbehaviour of their neighbours. However, despite being involved in these 'public' affairs, women did not experience the capital in the same way as men, and gender affected how individuals used urban space. To remain honourable and safe, women needed to avoid particular areas of the city and certain types of behaviour, consider their appearance, plan their routes, and pay attention to the time of day differently from men.⁷ The working and social conditions of London life offered women more opportunities to venture outside the household than in provincial communities. Many metropolitan women visited cookshops and bake-houses rather than preparing and cooking food at home. Job opportunities were more numerous and varied. Social and cultural instabilities resulted in women negotiating the construction of distinctive urban, feminine identities, defined by interplay between imagined and physical spaces. Concerns, expectations, and fantasies about city space reflected and intensified prevailing gender ideologies, and the place of female bodies in the capital was shaped by representations, ideologies, and subjective experiences. Concerns about female sexual disorder on the streets and in the fields, together with economic anxiety regarding women in the marketplace, were reflected on stage and in cheap print. The gendered use of space was thus dynamic, but worked on persistent understandings of relationships between disorder, sexuality, and femininity, involving interplay between the concrete and the imaginary.⁸ Experiences of the capital varied within as well as

⁶ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.205-12.

⁷ R. Shoemaker, 'Separate Spheres? Ideology and Practice in London Gender Relations, 1660-1740' in M. C. McClendon, J. P. Ward and M. MacDonald (eds.), *Protestant Identities: Religion, Society, and Self-Fashioning in Post-Reformation England* (Stanford, California, 1999), pp.266-87.

⁸ L. Gowing, "'The freedom of the streets': women and social space, 1560-1640' in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds), *Londinopolis: Essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), pp.130-51.

between genders, with social rank acting as a significant overlapping variable. Many single lower and middling-sort women moved around London more often than their male counterparts because they lacked institutional links and needed to support themselves through various temporary employments, for example domestic service or prostitution. Women were therefore more likely to develop 'metropolitan' identities.⁹

This recent historiography supports the observations of Phil Withington that no single early modern 'language of place' existed, and that instead the concept of place positioned individuals within institutional, geographical, and architectural structures. Place could thus be contested, controlled, and used; 'certain places were, by their very nature, public on a recurring basis: markets, streets, neighbourhoods, playhouses, taverns'. 'It was the possibility of observation, display, and subsequent dissemination – of the fact of company itself – rather than the inherent nature of a location that defined the publicness of speech and action'.¹⁰ This chapter explores female negotiations of space and place in early modern London. Although household space was considered to be female, what other connotations did privacy evoke, and how did these threaten female honour? To what extent could reputable women inhabit freely the streets, marketplaces, and public houses of the capital, and how acceptable was it for them to venture out to the hinterlands of the metropolis?

The problems of privacy

For a minority of elite, godly women, private, domestic space provided somewhere to pray, contemplate, read scripture, and record spiritual progress in diaries. Lower down the social order work and childcare commitments limited the ability of women to allot time to private devotions. Nonetheless, both plebeian and elite godly women

⁹ R. B. Shoemaker, 'Gendered spaces: patterns of mobility and perceptions of London's geography, 1660-1750' in J. F. Merritt (ed.), *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype, 1598-1720* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.147, 156-60, 163-65.

¹⁰ P. Withington, *The Politics of Commonwealth: Citizens and Freemen in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.122, 200.

attempted to transform their domestic environments into sacred spaces, and to find some quiet solitude within their houses for prayers and contemplation.¹¹ Privacy did not always require a separate room. Sometimes withdrawing into a corner or alcove that offered space for individual reflection provided sufficient privacy for personal devotions. Moments of this kind were deemed vital for religious health and offered pious women an escape from social convention and inhibitions imposed on women.¹²

Funeral sermons frequently praised women who sought to retreat from worldly concerns for spiritual reasons. Ann Smith was 'a Closet-christian' who devoted 'much time in reading and praying'. 'With mild commands within her walls-content / Her fervour was in secret prayer spent', noted Matthew Fowler.¹³ Margaret Bewley 'was observed to be frequent (not satisfying with Morning and Evening) every day in her Closet', and 'her weeping red eyes...manifested her ardent holy prayers'.¹⁴ Ann Yarburgh devoted 'great assiduity and intention of mind to Reading, Meditation and Prayer; setting apart certain hours of every day, for the exercise of those holy Duties, in which she was regular and constant'.¹⁵ This desire for and acceptability of privacy might be linked with what Matthew Johnson has described as a process of closure that witnessed an increase in the number of individual rooms and differentiation in their use within vernacular buildings between the late fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries. Such changes led to an increased emphasis on privacy and the individual, affecting the relationships of husband and wife, parent and child, and employers and servants, and segregating work-oriented space from 'domestic' space.¹⁶

¹¹ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.226-27.

¹² R. Warnicke, 'Private and Public: The Boundaries of Women's Lives in Early Stuart England' in J. R. Brink (ed.), *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England* (Kirkville, Missouri, 1993), pp.128-29; R. Huebert, 'The Gendering of Privacy', *Seventeenth Century* 16:1 (Spring 2001), p.47.

¹³ M. Fowler, *Gods Esteem of the Death of his Saints* (London, 1656), pp.24, 27-28.

¹⁴ E. Reynolds, *Imitation and Caution for Christian Women* (London, 1659), p.8.

¹⁵ Matthew Sutcliffe, *A Sermon at the Funeral of The Virtuous Lady, and Honoured, Ann, late Wife of Thomas Yarburgh, Esq. Preached on Monday, the 10th day of July, 1682* (London, 1682), p.19.

¹⁶ M. Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1996), pp.79-82.

However, theories of increasing privacy are problematic, especially in London where such changes may have occurred earlier than elsewhere in England. Structures could change significantly from when they were originally built, and houses differed markedly in size and internal layout, suggesting that no room had a fixed role. Labels attached to rooms varied; for example, 'chamber' did not always refer to a room used for sleeping.¹⁷ A shift to more moveable objects in homes means locations of objects in inventories may not correspond with places where they were used.¹⁸ House spaces were used by women and men, servants and children, and were often workplaces that many customers visited. No domestic space was recognised as distinctively 'female' since both women and men used rooms in similar fashion on an everyday basis.¹⁹ The room with the strongest claim to be 'female' was the kitchen, but not all dwellings in London had a separate room devoted purely to the preparation of food. Political and social pressures and tensions existed within and outside houses, and the relationships between and the individual identities of their inhabitants changed along with the uses of space.²⁰

The difficulties of reconstructing patterns of access and use of domestic spaces have caused some historians to question whether any privacy existed in early modern England. David Cressy claims that 'all life was public in early modern England, or at least had public, social, or communal dimensions', and that 'even within the recesses of domestic routine, every action, every opinion, was susceptible to external interest, monitoring, or control'.²¹ Lena Cowen Orlin has argued that people did not conceive

¹⁷ F. E. Brown, 'Domestic Space in Seventeenth-Century London' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28 (1986), pp.558-90; J. Schofield, 'Social Perceptions of Space in Medieval and Tudor London Houses' in M. Locock (ed.), *Meaningful Architecture: Social Interpretations of Buildings* (Aldershot, 1994), pp.188-206.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Archaeology of Capitalism*, pp.170-74.

¹⁹ L. Weatherill, 'A Possession of One's Own: Women and Consumer Behaviour in England, 1660-1740', *Journal of British Studies*, 25:2 (April 1986), p.154.

²⁰ Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism*, p.157.

²¹ D. Cressy, 'Response: Private Lives, Public Performance, and Rites of Passage' in B. S. Travitsky and A. F. Seeff (eds.), *Attending to Women in Early Modern England* (Newark, 1994), p.187.

of dichotomies between public and individual space, but of boundaries between public and shared space, exercising discretion when selecting those allowed into the latter. Privacy was not ‘an object of the architecture of this period’ since few people had experience of it.²² Privacy and domesticity comprised overlapping spaces and related habits, but were not interchangeable.²³

However, more recent scholarship has reinvigorated private space as a useful category of historical analysis and a term of telling resonance for medieval and early modern folk. Town and city dwellers accepted overcrowding in urban environments, but also desired private space within their own household boundaries, and they used the law to defend themselves from having their privacy trespassed upon by nuisance observers, listeners, sounds, and smells.²⁴ However, although privacy was desired, it was often problematic, and men felt more secure about the experience of privacy than did women.²⁵ Privacy in terms of secrecy could be dangerous for women because it was frequently conflated with sexual immorality, and women were potentially highly vulnerable if undue privacy or secrecy was imposed on them.²⁶ For women privacy carried ambiguous connotations, because although household walls were supposed to protect female bodies and honour, they also created suspicions of dishonour, sexual or otherwise, and left women vulnerable to potential male violence.²⁷

Family members, neighbours, and cohabitants recognised and commented on the need for couples to have some privacy during courtship, but being alone in such circumstances also carried connotations of illicit sexual activities. Privacy therefore

²² L. C. Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), p.185.

²³ E. Mazzola and C. S. Abate, ‘Introduction: “indistinguished space”’ in C. S. Abate (ed.), *Privacy, Domesticity, and Women in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2003), p.3. I would like to thank Dr Jayne Archer for providing me with a copy of this book.

²⁴ D. Shaw, ‘The Construction of the Private in Medieval London’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 26:3 (Fall 1996), pp.447-66.

²⁵ Huebert, ‘The Gendering of Privacy’, p.58.

²⁶ Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, pp.201, 229.

²⁷ Gowing, ‘Freedom of the streets’, p.134.

concerned both women and their guardians as alone and unsupervised women might be lured into marriage or worse.²⁸ Before the Reformation, as long as the mutual consent of both parties was obtained and two witnesses were present, a marriage was considered binding under canon law, regardless of where the couple had consented to the union. As a result Shannon McSheffrey has argued that such requirements make it anachronistic to label 'clandestine' those marriages that occurred outside the sacred space of a church.²⁹ By the early seventeenth century attitudes had altered drastically. William Gouge opposed 'clandestine marriages, such as are made in private houses, or other secret places, or in Churches without a sufficient number of witnesses, or in the night time, or without a lawfull Minister of the word'.³⁰ John Brinsley, quoting the Apostle Timothy, warned that 'there may be some such, who ... Creep into houses, and lead captive silly women'.³¹ Richard Flecknoe suggested some ladies 'in their chambers (for ought I do know) have weddings, and let the Marriages go'.³²

Young single women alone within enclosed environments were considered at risk from predatory men. Robin Goodfellow told how he knocked at doors 'and when the seruants came hee would blow out the Candle if they were men, but if they were women, hee would not onely put out their light, but kisse them full sweetly and then goe away'.³³ The anti-Catholic ballad *Good Sport for Protestants* described a priest tempting a young nun to sin, telling her there was no one nearby, and that she should extinguish the candle so they could be 'silent and still as the Night'. 'Dark deeds must be always done in a dark place; / Least the Wicked espie and we come to disgrace', he explained. Another ballad depicted Kate, a cook maid, telling her lover Ralph to speak quietly lest their conversation was overheard. The balladeer claimed

²⁸ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.146-48.

²⁹ S. McSheffrey, 'Place, Space and Situation: Public and Private in the Making of Marriage in Late-Medieval London', *Speculum*, 79:4 (October 2004), pp.962-71.

³⁰ W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), p.205.

³¹ J. Brinsley, *A Looking-Glasse for Good Women* (London, 1645), p.20.

³² R. Flecknoe, *The Diarium, or Journall* (London, 1656), p.84.

³³ *Robin Good-Fellow, His Mad Prankes, and merry Iests* (London, 1628), p.28.

he knew of their activities through 'a wench that watcht them all the night'. *The Kentish Maiden* told of a master offering his maidservant a guinea to sleep with him, and how she bought new cords for her bed in case the old ones broke and caused 'a strange discovery'.³⁴ However, not all women were depicted as complying with male wishes so willingly. In *The Academy of Pleasure* Jane warns James she will wake her parents if he offers her any 'rude tricks' in the dark.³⁵ During courtship a single woman therefore had to seek a degree of privacy for herself and her suitor whilst remaining aware that being alone with a man placed her in potential danger.

However, private space could also be beneficial for women. Some women pursuing immoral activities sought to preserve their good name and escape retribution at the hands of husbands, masters, or the law by exploiting opportunities for privacy that existed even in the crowded capital. Married women pursuing illicit relationships might contrive to find places and times where they would remain undetected, and cuckoldry and adultery were often associated with domestic spaces. Cuckolds lost control not only of their wives, but also their households, and were ridiculed for being unable to enter their own homes because of the size of their horns. Cuckoldry also disrupted the spatial and economic organisation of households: money, provisions, and sex were transferred to a lover when a husband was excluded from his own house and from the marriage bed.³⁶ At its most extreme cuckoldry led to the death of the husband. Lena Cowen Orlin has suggested that the proliferation of texts and plays about cuckoldry and domestic disorder in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England resulted from a transition from notions of masculine domestic space as metaphorical castles to the domestic sphere as the appropriate place for women.³⁷

³⁴ 'Good Sport for Protestants', *Pepys* iii, p.46; 'Jolly Ralph the Joyner, Or, Kind Kate the Cookmaid', *Pepys* iii, p.176; 'The Kentish Maiden; Or, The Fumbling Ale-draper derided', *Pepys* iii, p.86.

³⁵ *The Academy of Pleasure* (London, 1656), p.38.

³⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.94-96, 196-97.

³⁷ Orlin, *Private Matters*, pp.71-73, 243-45.

City comedies suggested that 'private' women were very likely to indulge in illicit sex, welcoming men into their houses and concealing them in locked, private chambers, in cellars, or behind curtains, drapes, and hangings. In *The Alchemist* Face and Subtle jest about how Dame Pliant shall 'taste the pleasures of a countess' and be courted, kissed, and ruffled behind her chamber hangings. They joke bawdily that such 'idolaters o' the chamber' will appear before her more bare than when they are at their prayers and serve her 'upon the knee', satirising godly notions of the private chamber as devotional space.³⁸ In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* Maudline intends to send the Welsh woman who 'looks for wooing' into Tim's room, leave them together, and lock the door.³⁹ In *Every Man in his Humour* Wellbred tells Dame Kately that 'Cob's wife is an excellent bawd' and that 'your husband haunts her house ... to what end I cannot altogether accuse him, imagine what you think convenient'. Later Dame Kately asks Tib, 'why grieves it you to ope your door? Belike, you get something, to keep it shut', and Cob enquires, 'do you let 'em lie open for all comers?' In the final scene Wellbred plays with bawdy ideas of illicit sex between mistress and manservant, telling Justice Clement that Edward will serve Bridget 'below the stairs'.⁴⁰ If men became suspicious of their wives they might seek to control who gained access to the house. In *The Devil is an Ass* Fitzdottrel believes that his wife intends to 'hang forth ensigns at the window', so that her suitor knows when he is absent. 'Your mistress is a fruit that's worth the stealing, and therefore worth the watching', he tells Pug, warning the devilish manservant to keep his eyes about him and allow into the house 'no lace-woman, nor bawd that brings French masks and cut-

³⁸ B. Jonson, *The Alchemist* (London, 1616), IV. iv. 39-44 in G. A. Wilkes (ed.), *Ben Jonson: Five Plays* (Oxford, 1999), pp.445-46.

³⁹ T. Middleton, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (London, 1630), IV. i. 69-73 in R. Dutton (ed.), *Women Beware Women and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1999) p.47.

⁴⁰ B. Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour* (London, 1616), IV. vi. 87-90; IV. viii. 19-20, 74-75; V. i. 206-09 in J. Knowles (ed.), *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies* (Oxford, 2001), p.207, 212-13, 221.

works Nor old crones with wafers to convey letters. Nor no youths disguised like country wives, with cream and marrow puddings'.⁴¹

Ballads also focused on such anxieties, and often depicted cuckoldry occurring in private, domestic environments.⁴² *The Cooper of Norfolk* told of a wife who 'kept a sheafe for another mans knife' and entertained him in her husband's house, whilst another song described the wife of a shepherd who stayed at home by the fire 'with a friend in a corner in some sort' whilst her husband trudged 'through dew and mire'. Another ballad wife was 'full of merry trickes', sleeping with various men when her husband left the house, and claiming her husband could not satisfy her sexually but others could.⁴³ *The Catalogue of Contented Cuckolds* depicted several instances of female adultery in the domestic environment. The wife of a brewer did 'ramble abroad' and would return home late at night 'with a spark'. A baker discovered his apprentice and wife together in the marital bed, and a cook described how 'brawny young William, the poulterer's man', visited his wife whenever he went out to dinner or a feast, and a turner knew that his wife's lover would visit her in his absence, and a sailor told of returning from sea after several years to find his wife had given birth to a daughter and a son.⁴⁴ Narratives of adultery recounted before the church courts could be remarkably similar to such ballad tales. On 18 June 1567 Elizabeth Charlewood confessed that 'being develishlie moved and forgetting hir sowle helthe and at ye importunate desire and continuall suyte of Robert Barnett dyd ... comitt adultery and fornication ... in a certaine sellar within her howse within St Botolph without Aldersgate her husband being at work printing'. Elizabeth told how she had

⁴¹ B. Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass* (London, 1631), I. vi. 209-13; II. i. 159-65 in M. J. Kidnie (ed.), *The Devil is an Ass and Other Plays* (Oxford, 2000), pp.244, 252.

⁴² E. Foyster, 'A Laughing Matter? Marital Discord and Gender Control in Seventeenth-Century England', *Rural History*, 4:1 (1993), pp.7-9.

⁴³ 'The Cooper of Norfolk', *Pepys* i, p.400; 'Innocent Shepherd and the Crafty Wife Or, A Dialogue between a Shepherd and his Love', *Pepys* iii, p.209; 'Man's Felicity and Misery', *Pepys* i, p.392.

⁴⁴ 'The Catalogue of Contented Cuckolds', *Roxburghe* ii, pp.481-83.

‘committed the like 2 or 3 tymes in the cellar and twice in the open felde near Newington beyond Southwark to her great danger and hurt of sowle’.⁴⁵

Londoners were therefore anxious that illicit sex could occur anywhere, and tales such as that told by Elizabeth Charlewood did little to ease their fears. In *The Captives* Milwood’s wife accuses her husband of not being satisfied with his ‘haunts abroad, where there are marts and places of lewd brotherly enough’ and claims he seeks to make their ‘private house’ into a stews.⁴⁶ John Taylor believed that ‘a damned crew of private whores’ had come into existence since the closure of the Southwark stews.⁴⁷ To some extent this was true, for as well as bawdy houses, many young women in London were kept in cheap lodgings by their lovers. In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* Sir Oliver threatens to ‘give up house and keep some fruitful whore, like an old bachelor, in a tradesman’s chamber’ if his wife remains childless.⁴⁸ The ballad of John Jarret claimed that the protagonist kept one woman near Billingsgate called Black Kate and one at Wapping who lived with her mother who was a bawd.⁴⁹ Thomasin Breame told the Bridewell governors how several men kept her at different times in various locations in London. Edmund English had the use of her body at the White Bear and provided her with money ‘to do such things as she needed’. Mr Kingeston kept her in Holborn, and Timothy Fielding kept her ‘a little above the bridge’ at the house of a glove-maker.⁵⁰ One servant in St John’s Street recounted how one Friday night in 1635, ‘about a fortnight or 3 weeks before Lady Day’, John Foster broke into the house and after promising her marriage ‘had the use and carnall knowledge of her body’, resulting in her becoming pregnant. She left and

⁴⁵ GL MS 9056, fo. 108r.

⁴⁶ T. Heywood, *The Captives Or The Lost Recovered*, IV. i. 108-12 in P. Merchant (ed.) *Thomas Heywood: Three marriage plays* (Manchester and New York, 1996), p.236.

⁴⁷ Cited in G. Salgado, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London, 1977), p.59.

⁴⁸ Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, III. iii. 60-61, p.41.

⁴⁹ ‘I tell you John Jarret, you’ll breake: Or, Iohn Jarrets wiues counsell to her husband, to haue care to his estate in this hard time, lest he turne Bankerout’, *Pepys i*, p.170.

⁵⁰ GL MS 33011/3, fos. 13r-14r.

‘lay at one William Thomas his house a cobbler in St Peters Lane where he had the carnall knowledge of her body upon a bed in an upper chamber about a fortnight after Easter’. Subsequently she moved to live at the house of John Fisher in Charterhouse Lane, and then to Putney, before seeking out John Foster ‘to see what he would give her she being then neere her time of childbed’. He gave her five shillings, and she left for Brentford, where she gave birth to a stillborn boy in a barn.⁵¹ Such narratives reveal that illicit sex occurred in private houses in many parts of the capital. They also illustrate that in early modern London formal prostitution and other forms of illicit sexual behaviour could not easily be distinguished as both were part of the makeshift economies of many poor women. Many prostitutes were part of wider metropolitan communities, and their sexual behaviour was not always distinguishable from the women and men with whom they lived in close proximity.⁵²

Sex outside marriage was thus often not about prostitution, but was central to the everyday relationships of many women and men. Single women pursuing licit or illicit relationships might contrive to find places and times where they would remain undetected. Numerous young single women were seeking to find husbands or court men who they hoped would ultimately propose to them. Many lived in lodging-houses and moved residence regularly, so the sexual freedoms they could enjoy were potentially great. Robert Finch and Elizabeth Essex conducted a secret relationship in the house Robert lodged in with George and Anna Tabb. Anna Izard deposed how the couple revelled at all hours, and that often Robert had to convey Elizabeth away ‘for feare of being apprehended by a constable’. Richard Baker, an apprentice to George Tabb, told how he went to Robert’s chamber at four o’clock on a Sunday morning to fetch a tankard of water for his master’s use. Richard knocked on the door. Robert

⁵¹ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 227r.

⁵² F. Dabhoiwala, ‘The pattern of sexual immorality in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London’ in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), pp.86-106.

was asleep, but Elizabeth was inside the room and woke him. Richard heard Robert kiss and smack Elizabeth before he came to the door and gave him the tankard. Robert refused to allow Richard into his chamber. Seeking to prove what he had discovered Richard visited the widow Goulding's house, also in St. Bride's parish, where Elizabeth rented a room. Upon asking for Elizabeth he was told by the widow she had not been home all night. Finally another Robert, a tailor lodging with Finch, told how he had come home late to find his bed 'warm by one who had laine there' and had spotted a woman going down the stairs he suspected was Elizabeth. Nicholas Watson and Alice Compeare may have enjoyed a similar relationship. Catherine Masters told how Alice rented a chamber from her for two pence a week for six weeks where she and Nicholas 'had ye carnall knowledge of each others body'.⁵³ Although secret couplings might blossom into respectable marriages, gossip and rumours about the origins of such relationships might return to haunt those involved. Magdalen Wright alleged Elizabeth Lewes's husband John had kept her a quarter of a year before they married and 'paid a quarters rent' for her.⁵⁴ There was a thin line between city girls enjoying male company through respectable courtship, and taking a lover who would provide for them in return for sexual favours. Neither type of behaviour was unusual, but the former was more respectable than the latter.

Respectable neighbours kept a close watch on women whose character or behaviour gave rise to suspicion, and defamatory stories were often triggered when secret immoral behaviour in the domestic environment was exposed. Such stories highlight the difficulty of attaining privacy in overcrowded and architecturally permeable buildings, the structures of which made privacy scarce and suspicious. Deponents claimed to have observed illicit liaisons through holes in walls and doors, or to have heard compromising noises coming from within locked rooms. Keys,

⁵³ GL MS 9057/1, fos. 107-09, 120-21, 191r.

⁵⁴ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 10r-v.

locks, and bolts aroused suspicions and might serve as metaphors for sex. Concepts of privacy were therefore significant, but fiercely contested.⁵⁵ For a woman to be seen alone with a man in a private room, especially if it was late at night and the house in question had a dubious reputation, was sufficient to start rumours. Margaret Rawson was taken with Robert Warren in a chamber of 'a suspicious house' and was 'suspected to be a very lewd p[er]son'. Annabelle Stafferdowne was accused of enticing a young man into her chamber 'as is her usual course'.⁵⁶ John South, a married man from Southwark, was 'suspiciously taken in a chamber with one Elizabeth Greene'.⁵⁷ Ann Wright, a Turnmill Street spinster, was found in the 'lewd defamed house' of Elizabeth Crobes hiding from the constables in a chest. Thomas West and Margery Gibson were discovered 'living incontinently together ... taken in a chamber together alone at eleven of the clock in the night'.⁵⁸ Cellars offered ideal spaces for illicit sex and parties discovered in them were treated with suspicion. Humfrey Broke had sex with Agnes Toppe in the cellar of a house of someone named Holland.⁵⁹ Helen Browne, a spinster from Turnmill Street, was 'taken in a lewd house hidden in a dark cellar'.⁶⁰ Thomas Nashe claimed brothels had 'back doores, to come in and out by undiscovered. Slyding windowes ... and trappe-bordes in floars, to hyde whores behind and vnder, with false counterfet panes in walls, to be opened and shut like a wicket'.⁶¹ Agnes Wilkinson deposed how 'she made a secret place in her house to kepe wenches and lewd women in'.⁶²

⁵⁵ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp.69-72, 98-99, 189-90.

⁵⁶ GL MS 33011/9, fos. 119, 171.

⁵⁷ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, p.240.

⁵⁸ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.20.

⁵⁹ GL MS 33011/3, fo. 3r.

⁶⁰ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.117.

⁶¹ Cited in J. Browner, 'Wrong side of the River: London's disreputable South Bank in the sixteenth and seventeenth century', *Essays in History*, 36 (1994), p.60. I would like to thank Dr Catherine Armstrong for providing me with a copy of this article.

⁶² GL MS 33011/4, fo. 9r.

If couples were discovered sitting close together, or were lying together on the bed or the floor, then the worst was always assumed. Depositions used terms such as uncivil, suspicious, private, familiar, unseemly, and notorious to connote disreputable activity. Judith Kiffener claimed to have found Elizabeth Durham with her husband, Andrew Kiffener, 'late in the night in a cellar in a very uncivil posture'.⁶³ Dorothy Camellald and Katherine Herbert were caught 'in a suspicious manner in bed with Peter Thompson in Drury Lane'. Thomas Williams and Mary Basett were found 'in a chamber privately and had been tumbling on the bedd'.⁶⁴ Henry Poole was accused of being 'very familiar' with Elizabeth Gunter 'in an unseemly and most dishonest fashion'. The couple were seen lying on a bed together in 'a private chamber' and 'did lye upon the floore together diverse nights'.⁶⁵ Godlyffe White simply claimed that Wallis's wife was 'a privy and a notorious sort'.⁶⁶

For single women who became pregnant private spaces might serve an entirely different purpose, as places to give birth in secretly, and to murder and dispose of an infant's body. Such crimes were perpetrated mostly by young single women working as servants or living at their own hands, whose often frequent mobility heightened concerns about their behaviour. Infanticide was deemed murder only if the child had been born alive, so women often attempted to avoid prosecution by denying that their child had been born alive, or by denying that a child had been born. Corpses of infants were disposed of in 'secret places' that might reinforce the belief that what was being disposed of had never been a human being.⁶⁷ The rituals of childbirth required the enclosure of women in all-female private spaces, but following the Infanticide Act of 1624 the nature of that privacy became more specific, and women

⁶³ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, p.236.

⁶⁴ GL MS 33011/9, fos. 134, 159.

⁶⁵ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 86r.

⁶⁶ GL MS 33011/3, fo. 10v.

⁶⁷ L. Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticides in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 156 (1997), pp.87-115.

were to give birth before female witnesses. By contrast secret births in private spaces were perceived as potentially threatening households and communities by facilitating illegitimate births and infanticides.⁶⁸

Women who murdered their newborn infants often did so in secret in bedchambers, hiding the corpses by burying them, or by concealing them in cellars, boxes, and trunks, or throwing them into a house of office. Joan Damporte murdered her newborn son in a bedroom in the house of Rose Mannynge, a Clerkenwell widow. Alice Saunders suffocated the baby girl she had borne secretly at the house of her master John Gott. Agnes Hughes suffocated her newborn son in a bedroom in the house of Mathew Stafford.⁶⁹ Mary Pilkington, Avis Butler and Helen Clare were accused of burying Mary's bastard child in a yard in Whitecross Street. Having been 'delivered of a female child alone and secretly in an upper chamber belonging to Helen Tayler, widow', Alice Taylor of Old Brentford in Ealing, possibly Helen's daughter, was accused, though acquitted, of wrapping the child in a piece of woollen cloth 'so that she voluntarily strangled and suffocated the said child'. Similarly Elizabeth Allen of Kensington was accused, though acquitted, of strangling and suffocating the baby girl she had born 'alone and secretly in an upper chamber in the house of Thomas Horwood'.⁷⁰ William Younger accused his estranged wife of burying her bastard child under her kitchen floor.⁷¹ Two 'young wenches' were found guilty of murdering their babies and concealing the bodies, one by throwing the infant into a house of office, the other by endeavouring to bury it in a cellar. A third woman hid the corpse of her murdered baby in a box in an adjacent room to the one in which she slept. Elizabeth Massinger hid the body of her dead baby 'under certain Boards,

⁶⁸ L. Gowing, 'Ordering the body: illegitimacy and female authority in seventeenth-century England' in M. J. Braddick and J. Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: order, hierarchy and subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.50-51.

⁶⁹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, pp.47, 105, 148.

⁷⁰ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, pp.263, 327.

⁷¹ Foyster, *Manhood*, p.124.

in a Cellar'. Mary Corbet delivered her child in private and smothered it between blankets before locking the corpse in a little trunk.⁷²

Issues of public and private were complicated further by household boundaries and thresholds. As disputes were often conducted in the streets, standing on doorsteps provided women with ideal vantage points from which to observe and overhear arguments, and to exchange insults. By standing at their doors women also reinforced their household allegiances, which in turn determined their community standing.⁷³ Prior to the Great Fire many houses were relatively open, liminal structures, making it difficult to tell where domestic became urban space. Alleys led to enclosed roofless courtyards that could be defined as either public or private, inside or outside. Even some doors were bisected horizontally, the lower half remaining closed, forming a barrier, and the top half remaining open, reinforcing the threshold as both a vantage and meeting point.⁷⁴ Therefore, to some extent, standing at their doors enabled women to fulfil both domestic and neighbourhood duties, since they were within the household boundaries whilst interacting with street life.⁷⁵ One church court deponent described how she was sitting in her shop, spinning, when she heard Johane Ryley 'chydinge and skoldinge very earnestlie' at Agnes Hoyle. Agnes responded by accusing Johane of being a whore and a bawd as they stood at Johane's doorstep. Similarly Margaret King stood on the doorstep of Johane Bushe to defame her as a drab and a harlot. Elizabeth Robert was at her window hanging out clothes one afternoon when she overheard Ann Parry, also hanging out clothes, say to Mrs Garland her neighbour that 'Alyce Pickering had reported that Anne Parry shold say that she Alyce Pickering was a whore'.⁷⁶ Margaret Lloyd stood at her door when she

⁷² OBP, 9 September 1674, t16740909-2; 14 April 1675, t16750414-3; 20 May 1681, t16810520-3; 9 April 1684, t16840409-20.

⁷³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.98.

⁷⁴ C. Heyl, 'We are not at Home: Protecting Domestic Privacy in Post-Fire Middle-Class London', *London Journal*, 27:2 (2002), p.13.

⁷⁵ Gowing, 'freedom of the streets', p.137.

⁷⁶ GL MS 9056, fos. 8v, 48v-49r, 87r.

told Robert Edge he was a base bawdy knave who earned a living through whores and knaves.⁷⁷ Anne Kenning reported how she was standing at her door and heard Joane Jearvis defame a woman named Fosset as a 'private ... pilfering queane' who allegedly had been driven from the parish she lived in previously.⁷⁸

In other ways doorsteps were deeply problematic spaces. Medieval prostitutes had been permitted to sit at the doors of the stews, but were prevented from soliciting for trade, and women continued to sell their bodies in such fashion after the closure of official brothels.⁷⁹ Henry Goodcole warned men to 'take heed of such as boldly stand at their doores to intice you, or say some Friend is in their houses that would speake with you: that is a true token or some ensuing mischiefe, to picke your pocket, and to bring you unto an Harlot'.⁸⁰ Emma Robinson, a London spinster, was accused of being 'a notorious Common Queane [who] sitteth up at the doare till xi or xii a clock in the night to entertaine lewde persons that resort unto her'. In December 1623 the Middlesex sessions heard that a lane adjoining Field Lane called Saffron Hill was 'pestered with divers immodest lascivious and shameless women generally reputed for notorious and common whores, who are entertained into divers houses for base and filthy lucre sake', and who, it was alleged,

Do usually sit at the doors of such houses, and by their wanton and impudent behaviour do allure and shamefully call unto them such as pass by that way, to the great corruption of youth and others in their manners and conversations, and to the intolerable terror and disquiet of all the inhabitants dwelling thereabouts, by reason of the manifold riots, routs, affairs and breaches of the King's peace as well by night as by day committed and done by such dangerous and insolent persons as frequent the companies of such women.⁸¹

⁷⁷ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 44v.

⁷⁸ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 17r.

⁷⁹ Salgãdo, *Elizabethan Underworld*, p.51.

⁸⁰ Goodcole, *Heavens Speedie Hue and Cry*, Sig. Cv.

⁸¹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*, pp.47, 171.

Illicit sex occurred literally on the physical boundaries of the household. Around nine or ten o'clock on a Monday night 'neere about Symon and Judes day' in autumn 1635 George Bucklie peered through the window of Rebecca Bingham's house and called inside to Thomas Loope to come out 'for by God Rebecca Bingham is a whore and they meaninge the company in the said howse are all whores' and that Bingham 'would not lett him rest but would fucke with him through the pale'.⁸² William Cole had the use of the body of Margaret Dillay in Petticoat Lane against the pale in an alley, whilst the watch took John Hall with a woman behind a pale on Tower Hill.⁸³

The inhabitation of private, domestic space by women should not be equated with the maintenance of female honour. Although being perceived as necessary for religious devotion and the intimacies of courtship, privacy for women was inherently problematic. Prostitutes and whores met their clients and lovers in 'private' chambers and their behaviour was frequently indistinguishable from that of respectable courting couples, involving sexual intimacy and the exchange of gifts or money. Men feared that women left alone in private spaces were cuckolding their husbands, or accepting marriage proposals from inappropriate suitors, whilst wives were concerned that their husbands had mistresses concealed in private rooms around the metropolis. Women might be vulnerable to male aggression in their own homes, and servants seeking to conceal and murder their illegitimate children often did so in the private chambers of their employers' households. Cellars, doorsteps, and chambers were all used for illicit sex, and constant alterations to buildings created numerous private spaces that could be used for both reputable and disreputable activities. As London housing was often hastily and badly constructed, the aural and visible permeability of 'private' spaces ensured the possibility of discovery was ever present. Like many other spaces,

⁸² GL MS 9057/1, fos. 99-101.

⁸³ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 52r, 70v.

private space had ambiguous connotations in relation to female honour. Women's lives needed to be confined to domestic space as much as possible, but women were always expected to be on view. A woman's good name was safe when she was with her husband, children or servants, but total privacy aroused many suspicions. Visits of friends were acceptable, but sociability depended on the purpose and the sex of the guest.⁸⁴

Street lives

As well as venturing outside the home to visit friends and fulfil neighbourly obligations, economic necessities and the requirements of good housewifery also brought women onto the streets. Numerous women visited London marketplaces several times a week, sometimes travelling from far beyond the city, to sell household produce, or goods they intended to sell on at a profit.⁸⁵ William Harrison told of purveyors whose wives sold 'eggs, butter, cheese, pigs, capons, hens, chickens, hogs, bacon' in one market that their husbands had bought at another.⁸⁶ Henry Peacham described women going to Smithfield and the markets, and also poor young maids coming to London 'to seek services and places'.⁸⁷ The author of *The Confession of the New Married Couple* described the mistress of the house venturing to Newgate, Cheapside, and the poultry markets to buy household necessities, accompanied by her neatly-dressed maid carrying a basket. On another occasion the mistress dispatched a maidservant to get conserves, preserves and sweet-meats from a shop in Blackfriars. More generally the author described how wives at 'the Shambles or Market' would 'stand and prattle' of 'Laces, Cookery, and other household occasions'.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ For sociability in the domestic and neighbourhood environments see chapter 5 above.

⁸⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, pp.275, 278; Capp, 'Separate Domains', pp.127-28; id. *When Gossips Meet*, pp.42-49, 52-54.

⁸⁶ W. Harrison, *The Description of England*, edited by G. Edelen (Ithaca NY, 1968), p.251.

⁸⁷ Peacham, *Art of Living in London*, Sig. Av.

⁸⁸ A. Marsh, *The Confession of the New Married Couple, Being the Second Part of the Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (London, 1683), pp.15, 55, 102.

Shopping and trading in streets and markets were therefore perfectly normal and acceptable activities for middling-sort and plebeian women. However, whilst going about their legitimate business women had to be on their guard and willing to stand their ground. Ballads and plays depicted men leering at and propositioning women as they went about their work. One ballad described a fiddler strolling in Moorfields and watching the maids washing clothes.⁸⁹ *The Fair Maid of Islington* told of a girl who regularly travelled to London to sell apples and pears, being accosted by a lustful vintner.⁹⁰ In *Michaelmas Term* the Country Wench acknowledges the hard work women perform, but associates female street-sellers with maligned tailors and prostitution, claiming that poor women must 'live by their ware'.⁹¹

The market-place was a location for the negotiation of commercial and social, private and personal conflicts. Although the market place was a prominent urban space that represented civic honour, it was also a place of loitering, resistance, and defiance, often becoming so crowded that it provided an environment for private subversive actions. The market place was thus an ambiguous site to which meanings could be applied. To abuse the market place was to denigrate the town or city, but to improve the site was to enhance civic dignity.⁹² Gender affected the significance of the space. Reputable women had to use the market-place as a work environment, and those women who used it for courtship or to contract marriage risked association with prostitution.⁹³ Even as a place of work women had to use the market-place carefully. They were expected to keep to certain gendered trading areas, and could be castigated

⁸⁹ 'A Mad Crue; Or, That shall be tryde', *Pepys* i, p.445.

⁹⁰ 'The Fair Maid of Islington; Or, The London Vintner Over-reach'd', *Pepys* iii, p.259.

⁹¹ T. Middleton, *Michaelmas Term* (London, 1607) III. i. 11-14; IV. ii. 10-13 in M. Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World, My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford, 1998), pp.100, 121.

⁹² D. Postles, 'The market place as space in early modern England', *Social History*, 29:1 (February 2004), pp.41-42. I would like to thank James Brown for drawing my attention to this article.

⁹³ McSheffrey, 'Place, Space, and Situation', pp.979-80.

for not doing so.⁹⁴ In *Bartholomew Fair* Leatherhead insults Joan Trash, calling her a 'lady o' the basket' and claiming that the 'gingerbread-progeny' she sells outside his shop consist of 'stale bread, rotten eggs, musty ginger, and dead honey'. Trash responds, ironically, that she is as upright a trader as any woman in Smithfield.⁹⁵ In Southwark itinerant female traders were discouraged from settling in a specific area. Herb-wives could not sit on Tuesdays or Thursdays, and fishwives were charged a penny for 'standing all the week'.⁹⁶ When Ellen Nicholson reproached Rowland Hubberstead for suggesting her husband had got Anne Hoskins pregnant Hubberstead 'bidd her goe to her own stall'.⁹⁷ Yet not all women were forced from the market place. In 1595 some women selling yarn informally in Cornhill were prosecuted for alleged unruly behaviour and for blocking the highway, but they were ultimately allocated their own space. Similarly, despite the abuse they gave to passers by, a group of women selling oranges and apples by the Exchange Gate were able to keep trading as well.⁹⁸

To cope with market-place life women had to be streetwise and assertive, and many were capable of deceiving unwary customers.⁹⁹ Women had to use initiative to maximise their profits, and those who worked as street vendors or hucksters knocked at the doors of regular customers to sell their wares, as well as trading in specifically designated areas.¹⁰⁰ Such behaviour sometimes brought women before the courts. Margaret Wyatt was accused of 'wandering abroad with glasses for drinking and other glasses, and offering the same drinking-glasses and other glasses for sale and purchase to divers of the King's lieges, in their private houses and not in open fairs or

⁹⁴ Gowing, 'Freedom of the streets', p.138.

⁹⁵ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, II. ii. 2-8, p.515; cf. Chapman, Jonson, Marston, *Eastward Ho*, I. i. 104, p.72.

⁹⁶ J. Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), p.75.

⁹⁷ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 47v.

⁹⁸ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.54; Gowing, 'Freedom of the streets', p.141.

⁹⁹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.46-47.

¹⁰⁰ McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp.128-32.

market, with the intention thereby of colouring her vagrancy with an appearance of 'lawful industry' at St. Clement's Danes and elsewhere in Middlesex. Mary Manering was said to be 'a hawker and forestaller of the markets', selling linen 'from door to door about the street'. Anne Woodward and Alice Hall were accused of 'wandering about with linen cloth and offering it for sale' in St. Giles's-in-the-Fields and Stepney respectively, 'unlawfully, cunningly and craftily' selling their wares in parcels and yards to 'the King's lieges and subjects, in their private houses and not in open fairs and markets'.¹⁰¹ To be considered a respectable market-trader, a woman needed to confine herself to a specific trading area and to focus solely on selling good quality wares.

Where a woman lived as well as where she worked affected her reputation. If a woman had managed to construct a good reputation amongst her neighbours, she might be reluctant to move to another part of the city where she was unknown, and where she knew no one. Moreover, if the new area had a bad reputation she might be concerned that her name would become tarnished by association. Elinor Peersby told John Strete that she could love him only 'yf he wold come and dwell in Aldersgate Strete, and that else she wold not have him nor make him any pr[o]myse to marry w[i]th him, for q[u]o[th] she I will by no meanes go forthe of that strete'. John would not accept her answer, and asked her 'to come home unto his house and to se[e] how she liked yt and thereupon to make him an answer'. The following Monday Elinor viewed the house but 'dyd not like yt, nor wold not dwell there' and again requested that John come to live with her in Aldersgate Street. John replied that 'yf she loved him she wold love the house well enough and so desired her to come and lie there yf yt where but for one night'. Elinor refused again and John told her that 'her talke pleased him as well as thoughe she had beaten him about the eares w[i]th her fyste',

¹⁰¹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume IV*, pp.30-33.

saying he would never wed her.¹⁰² This anecdote touches on broader issues regarding courtship and the movement of women around London. In the process of contracting marriage men were expected to visit the woman's place of residence, but if a woman went to visit and socialise in a man's space she risked gaining a negative reputation.¹⁰³ Such concerns may have been at the back of the mind of Elinor, but it may also have been that she disliked the area that John wanted her to move to, or that she did not want to risk being gossiped about. Her concerns were reflected in contemporary humour. One jest described a cobbler's wife discussing where she had lived before she married, and her apprentice mumbling that 'none but Whores and Bawds lived there'.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, women did move around the capital. Thomas Walin described Elizabeth Dudley's movements from Bishopsgate Street to Whore Lane, from Islington to Puddle Wharf, and to Southwark, and Mary Homes described working as her servant in Tuttle Street before Elizabeth went to Holborn.¹⁰⁵

Then as now some areas of London were safer and more respectable for women to be in than others. The Bridewell court-books and Middlesex sessions papers, together with social commentaries and contemporary drama, describe a metropolitan-wide vice trade encompassing districts predominantly outside or near the ancient walls and south of the river, including: Aldgate, Bankside, Billingsgate, Bloomsbury, Charterhouse Lane, Clerkenwell, Cow Cross, Duke Humphrey's, East Smithfield, Golden Lane, Petticoat Lane, Pickehatch, Radcliff, Saffron Hill, Shoreditch, Southwark, Spitalfields, St Katherine's, Turnmill Street, Wapping, Westminster, Whitecross Street, and Whitefriars.¹⁰⁶ Women in the streets after dark

¹⁰² GL MS 9056, fos. 26r-v.

¹⁰³ McSheffrey, 'Place, Space, and Situation', p.974.

¹⁰⁴ Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, p.80.

¹⁰⁵ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 13v-14r.

¹⁰⁶ Salgado, *Elizabethan Underworld*, pp.57-58; R. Ashton, 'Popular Entertainment and Social Control in Later Elizabethan and Early Stuart London', *London Journal*, 9 (1983), p.14; I. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.211-15; Griffiths, 'Structure of Prostitution', pp.40-41, 54; Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*,

were particularly in danger of gaining a bad reputation. The term 'nightwalker' began to carry specifically feminised meanings in early seventeenth-century London, and women accused of being nightwalkers were not always accused of other crimes. Paul Griffiths attributes this shift in meaning to a combination of demographic change, the creation of specific legislation targeting women, and the increasing number of terms used to label criminals and vagrants.¹⁰⁷ Henry Neville referred to 'Coursers, whose Recreation lies very much upon the New Exchange about 6. a clock at night', and Henry Goodcole listed places where 'harlots watch their opportunities to surprise men', including 'the little conduit in Cheapside in the evening' and 'St Antholins Church when the shops are shut up'.¹⁰⁸

Turnmill Street and Rosemary Lane acquired especially bad reputations. One jest described a young gentleman mocking his 'very deaf Hostess' by taking a cup of Wine and offering to drink 'to you, and to all your friends, the Bawds and Whores in Rosemary-lane'. His joke backfired when the hostess replied, 'thank you good Sir, with all my heart, I know you remember your Mother, your Sister, your Aunt, and the rest of your Kinred'.¹⁰⁹ *The Married-Womans Case* pitied the wives of whoremongers who risked infection from 'Turnbull-street fleas'.¹¹⁰ In *Bartholomew Fair* Alice calls Ursula the 'sow of Smithfield', and Ursula replies that 'ramping Alice' is the 'tripe of Turnbull', a punk and 'a sweet ranger', warning the audience to beware that they do not encounter her whilst walking through London.¹¹¹ In *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*

pp.177-78; Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, p.13; Jonson, *Devil is an Ass*, I. i. 59-61, 68-69, p.227.

¹⁰⁷ P. Griffiths, 'Meanings of Nightwalking in Early Modern England', *Seventeenth Century*, 13:2 (Autumn 1998), pp.213-38.

¹⁰⁸ H. Neville, *Newes from the New Exchange, Or the Commonwealth of Ladies, Drawn to the Life, in their severall Characters and Concernments* (London, 1650), p.20; Goodcole, *Heavens Speedie Hue and Cry*, Sig. C2r.

¹⁰⁹ Armstrong, *A Choice Banquet*, pp.135-36.

¹¹⁰ 'The Married-womans Case: Or Good Counsell to Mayds, to be carefull of hastie Marriage, by the example of other Married-women', *Pepys i*, p.410.

¹¹¹ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, IV. v. 54-55, 68-69, p.573.

the second promoter tells how he promised to send 'a fat quarter of lamb to a kind gentlewoman in Turnbull Street', probably as a payment for sexual favours.¹¹²

Disreputable women were perceived as originating from areas outside main thoroughfares, and each neighbourhood, street, and alley carried a specific resonance. Anxieties about the sexual histories of women thus ensured that female newcomers were treated with suspicions that could transform rapidly into gossip and insult.¹¹³ The places named corresponded with ideas of a metropolitan underworld circulating on the stage and in print, and sometimes, but not always, with locations of actual criminal behaviour. Elizabeth Welsh told Mary Peters, 'thou art a base queane and a strumpet, get thee out of my house into Turnbull Street for I will keep no bawdy house for thee'. Bridget Colt claimed she would see Hester Pascall 'carted shortlie' and 'bid her goe into Turne Bull Street for that place was fittest for hir'.¹¹⁴ Sarah Knighte and Joan Ryce were found guilty of keeping a bawdy house in Rosemary Lane and were sentenced 'to be carted in several carts, to be staked upright without hat or covering and to be rung out with bells and basons' in their local street.¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Frisby and Jane White were taken 'in a suspicious house in Rosemary Lane' and Jane Damporte was accused of 'keeping a lewd victualling house' in Rosemary Lane.¹¹⁶ Drawing on the negative connotations of the South Bank John Sorrell called Eleanor Meade a common whore and a private whore, alleging Eleanor had been carried out of Southwark over London Bridge in a peddler's basket.¹¹⁷ The moral connotations of metropolitan streets and suburbs also spread beyond the confines of the capital. Elizabeth Ballard accused Henry Penrose of calling her 'London whore, Newgate whore and Billingsgate whore' in her Yorkshire parlour, an incident which

¹¹² Middleton, *Chaste Maid*, II. ii. 110-12, p.24. According to Laura Gowing the title of the play is meant to be an oxymoron: Gowing, 'Freedom of the Streets', p.146.

¹¹³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.67, 100-01.

¹¹⁴ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 151r; LMA DL/C/235, fo. 50v.

¹¹⁵ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume II*, p.139.

¹¹⁶ GL MS 33011/9, fo. 22; *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.7.

¹¹⁷ GL MS 9057/1, fos. 26r, 28v.

reveals that the potency of belief about a moral geography of the capital spread far beyond the metropolis.¹¹⁸

Women's presence in one particular type of space, the public house, caused much controversy amongst contemporaries. Women were customers in taverns, inns and alehouses, but historians know much less about how they were treated in such establishments, or about how their presence in public houses affected their reputations. Why and with who did women frequent public houses, and how were they treated by the customers, owners, and staff? In his pioneering and influential study of the alehouse Peter Clark outlined how the visits of women to such establishments were regulated by social conventions. Wives visited with husbands whilst travelling and girls accompanied young men they were courting if other couples were present. Women of all ages attended neighbourhood and family events such as christenings or churching without their behaviour being detrimental to their honour. If women alone or in an all-female group ventured into a public house matters became complicated. Such women might be deemed drunkards or whores, whilst wives going to retrieve their husbands risked facing abuse from the proprietor, customers, or the husband. According to Clark public houses became increasingly masculine environments in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Puritans and magistrates believed they threatened patriarchal families, separating children from parents, servants from masters, and husbands from wives. Such connotations were disappearing by the later seventeenth century with Puritanism declining and economic conditions improving, but public houses remained masculine spheres which reputable women visited only with husbands, boyfriends or other respectable male associates.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Withington, *Politics of Commonwealth*, p.200. I would like to thank Dr Angela McShane-Jones for drawing my attention to this reference.

¹¹⁹ P. Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (London, 1983), pp.131-32, 147-51, 225-26, 235-36.

Recent scholarship has questioned, elaborated on and modified this model. Keith Wrightson described the alehouse as a social site for female and male servants and youths.¹²⁰ Pamela Allen Brown shows that public houses were depicted and described as mixed gender spaces in jests, woodcuts, and ballads and stresses the centrality of women as owners, customers, consumers, and critics.¹²¹ By contrast Paul Griffiths argued that 'outside the courtship culture that was common to both sexes ... women made scant use of the alehouse, which emerged as a place of male entertainment in the first instance, and that those women who did resort to the alehouse or in female company were exposed to a heavy load of suspicions and innuendoes', particularly regarding their reputations and cleanliness. Some women may have had to wait to be invited to the alehouse, and others may have stayed away from such venues completely.¹²² Lynn Martin argues that public houses were male environments and that women's ability to enter them varied over time and space. Women went to alehouses for sociability, solidarity, enjoyment and entertainment, to conduct business, courtships or marriage negotiations, to seek shelter, and even merely to drink.¹²³ Laura Gowing defined the alehouse as 'an occupational domestic space especially prone to economic and social tensions'.¹²⁴ Barbara Hanawalt described alehouse interiors as 'ambiguous territories' and suggested that in terms of gender and space a public house was 'an economic and social site at which traditional distinctions were blurred', but added that the alehouse culture and environment nonetheless tainted reputations of women who worked and socialised therein.¹²⁵ Beat

¹²⁰ K. Wrightson, 'Alehouses, order and reformation in rural England 1590-1660', in S. Yeo and E. Yeo (eds.), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914* (Brighton, 1981), pp.1-27.

¹²¹ P. A. Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London, 2003), pp.15-16, 73-74.

¹²² Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, pp.208-09, 211.

¹²³ A. L. Martin, *Alcohol, Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp.73-75.

¹²⁴ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.212.

¹²⁵ B. Hanawalt, 'The Host, The Law and the Ambiguous Space of Medieval London Taverns' in her *'Of Good and Ill Repute': Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1998), pp.105-08.

Kümin has illustrated the diversity of public house patrons across Europe, which he suggests made for 'some interesting encounters'. Economic necessity, courtship, and the requirements of festive and ceremonial life all played a part in determining the acceptability and willingness of women to enter public houses. So too did geography, with inns and taverns on major transit routes most likely to welcome a broad range of patrons, and many public houses contained female clients of both good and ill repute.¹²⁶ Bernard Capp has argued that, although husbands worried about where and with whom their wives socialised and drank, it was not considered unusual for women to drink in public houses, notably spinsters, servants, and younger women 'living at their own hands'. However, the presence of women in alehouses at night was problematic, and at all times depended on their good behaviour.¹²⁷

Women often ventured into alehouses on business-related matters. Elizabeth Wilson, a market-woman from West Ham, went with her gossips to *The King's Head* near Leadenhall to drink wine before making their way home.¹²⁸ Other women had to venture into public houses as part of their household responsibilities. Robert Fowler sent Elizabeth Clark to fetch drink from an alehouse. Women also participated in the criminal activities that occurred in some public houses. One woman wandered into a London victualling house to drink a pot of ale and after a while 'desired the Woman of the House to lend her a Chamber pot', distracting the hostess long enough to steal a silver tankard. More boldly Anne Parker used the carriers at *The Blossoms* inn to dispatch her stolen goods.¹²⁹

Some ballads depicted women drinking and socialising in public houses, and generally suggested such behaviour was perfectly acceptable if the women in question

¹²⁶ B. Kümin, 'Public Houses and their Patrons in Early Modern Europe' in B. Kümin and B. A. Tlusty (eds.), *The World of the Tavern: Public Houses in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002). I would like to thank PD Dr Kümin for providing me with a copy of this essay.

¹²⁷ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp.331-32, 334-40.

¹²⁸ Capp, 'Separate Domains', p.128.

¹²⁹ OBP, 2 July 1684, t16840702-14; 29 April 1674, t16740429-5; 8 October 1684, t16841008-2.

were accompanied by at least one male companion. *A most pleasant dialogue: Or a merry greeting between two lovers* described Will asking Nan if she would go to the tavern with him to 'take a pint of sack or claret' and eat 'fine sugar cakes'. *The Countrey Lasses Good Counsel* described young men and maids going to taverns and feasting on cakes and wine.¹³⁰ Samuel Pepys engaged in polite sociability with both women and men in alehouses. When visiting *The Miter* in Wood Street Samuel met several friends, both male and female, and the party were 'very merry'. On another occasion, along with Mr Hill and some female acquaintances, Pepys visited a tavern in Popes Head Alley. Such visits might be planned or spontaneous. When Sir William Penn came for dinner with his son and daughter one Boxing Day, Samuel and Elizabeth took them by coach to Moorfields to walk, but because of bad weather they went instead to an alehouse where they consumed cakes and ale, and were entertained by a wassailing woman and girl. On another occasion when Samuel and Elizabeth left a playhouse, a hailstorm led them to seek shelter in 'a little alehouse' until they could get a coach home.¹³¹

Other songs offered more satirical representations of women in public houses. The 'lusty, couragious and stout' heroine of *The Jolly Welsh-Woman*, for instance, headed to *The Sign of the Crown* for a drink as soon as she arrived in London. *Londons Ordinarie* satirised drinking dens of Londoners, describing ladies dining at *The Feathers*, bawds going to *The Negro*, whores to *The Naked Man*, maidens to *The Mayden-Head*, and lovers to *The Dove*. Although based heavily on puns and wordplay the message of the ballad was that some drinking dens were more acceptable for women than others, and that different public houses catered for specific

¹³⁰ 'A most pleasant Dialogue: Or A merry greeting between two lovers, How Will and Nan did fall at strife, And at the last made man and wife', *Pepys* i, p.311; 'The Countrey Lasses Good Counsel', *Pepys* iii, p.20.

¹³¹ *Pepys, Diary*, 14 September 1660, i, p.244; 26 July 1661; 26 December 1661, ii, pp.141, 239; 1 June 1664, v, pp.165-66.

clientele.¹³² Some contained various customers in the same building, but not the same room, and segregating different sorts of drinkers could be difficult. One jest described a drunken gentleman barging into a side room of *The Feathers* tavern in Cheapside ‘where many civill persons [were] with their wives at supper’, suggesting the risk of culture clashes because of the diversity of people in one drinking establishment.¹³³

Drinking houses played a significant role in the courtship process of youthful and plebeian Londoners, and evidence from marriage contract disputes suggests there was nothing inherently disreputable about a woman being in a tavern. Drinking and eating together in public houses provided a neutral, respectable space for couples to become more closely acquainted away from employers and parents. Marriages of younger, poorer sorts were frequently contracted in public houses because of their importance as social centres where witnesses would be present.¹³⁴ John Hickeman visited *The Sultan* near Billingsgate and went into an upper room where he witnessed James Thomas and Cycilie Holland ‘drinking and making merry’ with several other people because James wanted to propose to Cycelie.¹³⁵

The uncertain status of drinking establishments as public or private made them ideal arenas for the ambiguities of courtship, but might also cause concerns about what couples were doing within their walls.¹³⁶ George Ireland saw John Newton and Joane Waters at *The Crown and Goat* in West Smithfield being ‘very loving and extraordinary kind’ to each other by ‘kissing and embracing together very lovingly’, and believed Joane was ‘very much affected’ with John.¹³⁷ Less ambiguous were the

¹³² ‘The Jolly Welsh-Woman’, *Pepys* iii, p.75; ‘Londons Ordinarie, Or Every Man in his humour’, *Pepys* i, pp.192-93.

¹³³ *Mirth in Abundance* (London, 1659), pp.13-14.

¹³⁴ McSheffrey, ‘Place, Space, and Situation’, pp.980-85.

¹³⁵ GL MS 9056, fo. 12r.

¹³⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.147; Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, p.201.

¹³⁷ LMA DL/C/219, fo. 417 in P. Crawford and L. Gowing (ed.), *Women’s Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 2000) p.139.

actions of Elizabeth Powell and Miles Home, who were caught having sex in the gallery of *The Catherine Wheel* in Southwark.¹³⁸ Samuel Pepys rendezvoused with various women in public houses. Samuel went with Mrs Lane to *The Kings Head* at Lambeth Marsh where they consumed 'variety of meats and drinks' to the value of ten shillings, and Pepys 'did so towse her and handled her; but could get nothing more from her'. They met again at *The Trumpet* the following January, 'but the room being damp we went to the Bell tavern and there I had her company, but could not do as I used to do (yet nothing but what was honest) for that she told me she had them'. Six months later the couple returned to 'the old house at Lambeth-marsh' where Pepys had 'my pleasure of her twice'. On another occasion Samuel visited 'a little blind alehouse' in Moorfields with Mrs Bagwell, 'and there I did caress her and eat and drank'. Less than a month later he 'took her away ... to an alehouse, and there I made much of her; and then away thence and to another, and endeavoured to caress her'. Pepys also drank with Doll Lane at *The Dog*, *The Rose*, *The Swan*, and *The Half Moon* taverns, spent the morning at *The Swan* 'tumbling' with Frances Udall, and went to 'a little blind alehouse within the walls' with Deb Willet after she had been dismissed from his service.¹³⁹ London's public houses continued to be a location for courtship and pre- or extramarital sex far into the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁰

Women's presence in drinking establishments could be problematic as they were often taken to be prostitutes or whores. When the Middlesex sessions were told about 'notorious, common and professed whores' being 'entertained into victualing or other houses suspected for bawdry houses ... for base and filthy lucre and gaine' the

¹³⁸ GL MS 33011/3, fo. 1v.

¹³⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 5 August 1663, iv, p.263; 9 January 1664; 23 July 1664, v, pp.9, 219-20 (Mrs Lane); 15 November 1664; 19 December 1664, v, p.322, 350 (Mrs Bagwell); 26 October 1666; 7 November 1666; 26 November 1666; 31 December 1666, vii, pp.342, 359, 385, 425 (Doll Lane); 20 May 1667, viii, p.224 (Frances Udall); 15 April 1669, ix, p.521 (Deb Willett).

¹⁴⁰ T. Hitchcock, "Unlawfull begotten on her body": Illegitimacy and the Parish Poor in St Luke's Chelsea' in T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), p.70.

magistrate responded by targeting victuallers who entertained, harboured, or allowed into their properties 'lewd, suspected, dissolute and defamed women'.¹⁴¹ In 1661 at Bartholomew Fair Samuel Pepys entered 'a pitiful alehouse, where we had a dirty slut or two come up that were whores' and in 1662 visited 'a little house behind the Lord's house to drink some Warmewood ale, which doubtless was a bawdy house – the mistress of the house having that look and dress'.¹⁴² One joke described a woman blaming her daughter for 'gadding up and down among Ale-houses'. The daughter retaliated, saying that her mother had reason to be jealous 'for I have often heard it said, that I was your daughter afore ever that you was married to my Father', hinting at a connection between illicit sex and alehouses.¹⁴³

Because of the connections between public houses and sex, reputable women were warned against visiting them. One printed love letter written by a jealous country girl to her 'Neighbour Robin' begged him to stay away from another girl named Margery, 'and specially that you go not with her into any alehouse, to drink and talk with her'.¹⁴⁴ When William Perry invited Elizabeth Redman into a tavern to drink a pint or two of wine he 'put his hande under [her] coates' and kissed her.¹⁴⁵ When dining at 'the Legg in the Palace' Samuel Pepys followed the girl of the house into a chamber and kissed her. Pepys also recorded how Doll, having gone for a bottle of wine 'did come home all blubbering and swearing against one Captain Vandena' who had pulled her into a stable by *The Dog* tavern 'and there did tumble and toss her'.¹⁴⁶ Suzan More deposed that Thomas Creed requested frequently that she went drinking with him, and told how they drank wine at *The King's Head* in Red Cross Street with her mistress, Mrs Birke. Thomas told Suzan that had he given her

¹⁴¹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, pp.13.

¹⁴² Pepys, *Diary*, 31 August 1661, ii, p.166; 21 March 1662, iii, p.49.

¹⁴³ *Poor Robin's Jests*, p.73.

¹⁴⁴ Cited in A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986), p.302.

¹⁴⁵ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 236r.

¹⁴⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 6 April 1661, ii, p.66; 6 July 1667, viii, p.323.

mistress 'a pint more ... he could have done what he had would with her'. Around Midsummer 1607 the pair went to *The Sun* tavern in Aldersgate Street where Thomas bought Suzan 'so much wine as she was drunk and sick withal'. Thomas took her to the alehouse of Widow Grimes in Picket Hatch and as Suzan lay in a chamber to sleep off her drinking he had the use of her body. Thomas continued to demand that Suzan go with him to alehouses and taverns, and she explained how he became angry if she refused. She went to Widow Grimes' alehouse with Thomas twice more and on both occasions he had sex with her. When Suzan realised she was pregnant she arranged to meet him in a tavern in Old Fish Street, with another servant, Blanche, but Thomas claimed Suzan's master Randall Birke was the father of the child.¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Deer, a sixteen-year-old virgin from St Katherine's parish, was enticed from the house of her aunt to *The Cock* in Aldersgate Street by John and Abigail Bargeer. The couple made Katherine lie in bed with them before being taken elsewhere in the parish and raped by John.¹⁴⁸ On the basis of such behaviour it is not surprising to find Pepys writing that 'Mr Sanchy could not by any argument get his lady to trust herself with him into the tavern'.¹⁴⁹

The interactions of women and men in public houses, however, were not only about male aggression and female vulnerability. John Frye described how he was drinking with Peter Tucke and Thomas Walton in the victualling house of Thomas Nevell and deposed that Walton went up into a chamber of the house with a lewd woman and had the use of her body, an incident he and Tucke allegedly witnessed through a hole in the wall. The 'lewd woman' was Susan Holland who also lived in the house. She deposed that although Nevell had offered to use her body and had pulled up her clothes he had been so drunk that 'he could not affect his purpose'.

¹⁴⁷ LMA DL/C/218, fo. 138 in Crawford and Gowing (ed.), *Women's Worlds*, pp.142-46.

¹⁴⁸ OBP, 16 May 1689, t16890516-79.

¹⁴⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 25 November 1661, ii, p.220.

Susan also deposed that earlier she had allowed both Tucke and Frye to have the use of her body.¹⁵⁰

Women who were known or suspected to frequent alehouses on a regular basis were criticised and abused, both by other women and by men, as lazy, drunken and immoral. When one of her neighbours challenged Alice Collet for washing on a Sunday Alice replied 'it was better to do so than to go from alehouse to alehouse', suggesting only idle women who drank heavily visited such places.¹⁵¹ Such associations were reinforced by the language of insult, with neighbours telling alleged offenders that their proper place was in a seedy alehouse. Mary Hackett told Elizabeth Fitzherbert she was a drunken slut and that she should go to the *Green Dragon* 'every day like a drunken sow'.¹⁵² Mary denigrated Elizabeth's drinking by suggesting she was a habitual drunkard, an animal not fit for human society. John Stocke told how Mary Lymet was suspected to have live incontinently 'with divers and sundry persons' and how he had heard it reported credibly that 'she did frequent the company of one Baker and did use to goe with him from alehouse to alehouse in very unseemly fashion at unsutable hours'.¹⁵³ Whilst her husband was away at sea, Dorothy Skelton conducted her affair with Charles Brookes in various alehouses and was condemned by her neighbours for doing so.¹⁵⁴ Sara Lee claimed to have seen Elizabeth Wyatt overcome with drink several times between 1633 and 1635, and deposed that Elizabeth was 'a great frequenter of taverns and alehouses'. About Christmas 1634 Elizabeth had been so drunk at *The Red Cross* alehouse in the parish of Christchurch that 'she was unable to goe stedfastly but reeled and staggered up and downe the streetes as she went home'. Elizabeth Selby claimed that Wyatt was drunk so often that the market women would call out to each other that someone should grab

¹⁵⁰ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 43v, 47r-47v.

¹⁵¹ Gowing, 'freedom of the streets', p.140.

¹⁵² Clark, *English Alehouse*, p.132.

¹⁵³ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 126r.

¹⁵⁴ Foyster, *Manhood*, p.113.

hold of her so she did not collapse in the street. Elizabeth Wyatt was seen at unlawful hours in the night in taverns and victualling houses in the company of Abraham Brand, a married man and father. Judith Simnell deposed that the two had been 'com[m]on frequenters of each other's company these 3 years' and were often in a tavern in Newgate Market until twelve or one in the morning revelling and laughing so much that the room was 'washed with wine'.¹⁵⁵ Excessive alcohol consumption together with sociability in dubious locations late at night pushed Elizabeth's behaviour beyond neighbourhood boundaries of respectability.

Even being the proprietor of a drinking establishment risked jeopardising a woman's good name, especially if she was single and young. In March 1668 Samuel Pepys received a letter 'giving me notice of my Cosen Kate Joyces' being likely to ruin herself by marriage and by ill reports already abroad of her'. Samuel agreed with the assertions of the writer. 'I do fear that this keeping of an Inne may spoil her', he wrote. Three days later Samuel dined with Kate Joyce, and they discussed her marriage prospects. 'It will be best for her to marry I think as soon as she can', wrote Pepys, 'at least to be rid of this house – for the trade will not agree with a young widow that is a little handsome'.¹⁵⁶

In many respects Kate Joyce was a typical female public house proprietor in early modern England. From the mid-sixteenth century the majority of women granted licences to run alehouses were widows. Judith Bennet has argued that older widows were more likely to be allowed to run alehouses because they were less likely to be involved in prostitution and other disorderly behaviour, and more in need of relief. Traditionally, female alehouse-keepers tended to brew their own ale, and worked at other occupations whilst running an alehouse.¹⁵⁷ According to Bennett

¹⁵⁵ GL MS 9057/1, fo. 69r, 235r-230r (reverse foliation). The case is discussed in D. Cressy, 'Another Midwife's Tale: Alcohol, Patriarchy and Childbirth in Early Modern London' in id, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), pp.84-91.

¹⁵⁶ Pepys, *Diary*, 19 March 1668; 22 March 1668, ix, pp.124, 127.

¹⁵⁷ Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters*, pp.56, 108.

misogynist images of alewives in literature, drama, and art encouraged and made acceptable their public ridicule. Victuallers in general were viewed with suspicion, but alewives were targeted for reasons other than dubious business practices. They were often depicted as ugly and unhygienic, but also as flirtatious and promiscuous, luring married men away from their wives and encouraging them to spend money on drink that ought to have been given to their spouses for housekeeping. Alewives were also accused of encouraging vice and being disrespectful to God and the church by opening their premises on the Sabbath.¹⁵⁸ *A Caveat for Young Men* warned men that alewives would 'suck you as Bees suck honey then hang you behind your back'.¹⁵⁹ Marjorie McIntosh argues that independent female sellers of ale were clamped down on during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and that by the early seventeenth century local and national legislation aimed to restrict ale-selling to elderly or widowed women, suggesting that the number of independent female innkeepers declined from the Elizabethan-Jacobean period with the growing complexity of such establishments. However, married women continued to play a significant role in the everyday business of running the public houses of their husbands, without necessarily being frowned upon, and many women were employed to serve ale, or to carry out domestic-related duties in inns.¹⁶⁰

Legal records reveal that alewives were in trouble with the law for numerous reasons. Agnes Gee was presented at the Middlesex sessions for 'victualling without license and keeping a lewd house in her husband's absence at sea'.¹⁶¹ Agnes was clearly in need of money whilst her husband was away and had resorted to allowing her rooms to be used for illicit sexual liaisons to raise extra revenue. As already seen entertaining disreputable individuals could seriously damage female reputation. In

¹⁵⁸ J. M. Bennett, 'Misogyny, Popular Culture and Women's Work', *History Workshop Journal*, 31 (Spring 1991), p.166-88; id., *Ale, Beer and Brewsters*, pp.122-44.

¹⁵⁹ 'A Caveat for Young Men. Or, The Bad Husband turn'd Thrifty, *Pepys ii*, p.22.

¹⁶⁰ McIntosh, *Working Women*, pp.156-63, 202-09.

¹⁶¹ *Middlesex Calendar 1612-1614*, p.379.

1627 Thomas Brachier told how Joane Nevill kept an alehouse in Chick Lane in St Sepulchre's parish where she enticed and lodged 'very dissolute and wicked people'. 'One Smith', a known acquaintance of Nevill, robbed a countryman lodger in the alehouse, and Brachier described Smith as 'a common cheater' who did 'play with and cosen men that came to [Nevill's] alehouse either at cardes or dice and those which they could not soe coosen they did rob or purloyne from them such goods as they had about them'. Brachier claimed he had heard Joane say that 'she had witt enough to make a foole of a hundred of them'. Two years earlier Joane had been presented by the churchwardens of St Sepulchres for keeping 'a suspicious bawdy house and for entertayning lewd people into her house at unseasonable and unlawful times'.¹⁶² In 1672 John Francis accused Susan Altime of encouraging his apprentice to waste his time and money in her public house, the *Three Tunns* in St Sepulchre, defaming her as an old whore and claiming she swindled money from her husband. Richard Shawe, a wine cooper at a Smithfield public house, also called the *Three Tuns*, reported in 1676 that the fighting and quarrelling of his wife disturbed his house and guests, and brought his house into such disrepute that his customers left. This affected his trade so badly that creditors had seized his goods and turned him out.¹⁶³ Politics and religion as well as sex and money could lead to the presentation of alewives. Dr Symon Digby complained that Dorothy Crowch kept a disorderly tavern, and allowed her son and others 'to sing reproachfull songs in her howse against the Parliament'.¹⁶⁴ Joane Byngham of Stepney was reported for keeping 'ill rule in her victualling [house]' and for being a scold and not receiving communion since the previous Easter.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² LMA DL/C/231, fo. 7r-8r.

¹⁶³ Foyster, *Manhood*, pp.154, 116.

¹⁶⁴ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, p.178.

¹⁶⁵ GL MS 9064/13, fo. 9r.

Not all alewives were so troublesome, however, or had such bad reputations. Edward Bowers and his wife operated a cookhouse next to the Rose tavern in Bussell Street in Covent Garden, and were 'very honest people' who had 'the good will and love of all their neighbours'.¹⁶⁶ Samuel Pepys visited an alehouse in Drury Lane with Mr Woodfine, where they drank, ate toasted cakes, and enjoyed 'a good deal of mirth with the mistress of the house'. On another occasion Pepys drank in Holloway 'at the sign of a woman with Cakes in one hand and a pot of ale in the other, which did give good occasion for mirth, resembling her to the mayd that served us'. He described the maid of another alehouse as confident, merry, modest, and 'very pleasant to the customers', and when he visited *The Harp and Bell* 'entertained myself in talk with the maid of the house, a pretty maid and very modest'.¹⁶⁷ The author of *The Confession of the New Married Couple* noted that the best inns had 'a good table, delicate wine, (and a handsom[e] Wench)'.¹⁶⁸ Donald Lupton also promoted a positive image of the alewife, claiming that 'if her Ale bee strong, her reckoning right, her house cleane, her fire good, her face faire, and the Towne great or rich; shee shall seldome or never sit without Chirping Birds to beare her Company, and at the next Churching or Christening, shee is sure to be ridd of two or three dozen of Cakes and Ale by Gossiping Neighbours'.¹⁶⁹ Being a good alewife thus seems to have been about striking a balance between welcoming customers into one's establishment, and keeping out unruly elements, or at least controlling their behaviour.

The women on the streets of early modern London defy simple categorisations. Some were undoubtedly disreputable, operating as criminals and prostitutes, but the dividing line was often blurred between such women and those

¹⁶⁶ Price, *Bloody Actions Performed*, p.15.

¹⁶⁷ Pepys, *Diary*, 18 March 1660, i, p.91; 24 September 1661, ii, p.184; 22 June 1663, iv, p.192; 23 April 1665, vi, p.87.

¹⁶⁸ Marsh, *Confession*, p.62.

¹⁶⁹ D. Lupton, *London and the city carbonadoed and quartred into seuerall characters* (London, 1632), pp.130-31; cf. Judith Bennett's evaluation of this text in *Ale, Beer and Brewsters*, p.130.

making shift by working in markets and public houses. Female traders were tolerated provided they kept to their own sections of the market place and removed themselves from the streets after nightfall. Women who frequented public houses can be placed in two categories, consumers and workers, but both were considered to be potentially disreputable. To some extent the reception of a woman in a public house depended on what type of establishment she entered; for example, better quality inns and taverns might be more welcoming to female patrons. Women were accepted more readily if accompanied by men, and if they were visiting in the context of betrothal or wedding celebrations. By contrast a woman risked obtaining a bad reputation if she drank heavily, especially late at night, either alone or in the company of a man who was not her husband. Alewives might earn a degree of respect if they welcomed customers, dealt with them fairly, and offered a pleasant and respectable environment in which to eat and drink. Those who allowed illicit sex, gambling, or seditious talk faced condemnation and perhaps prosecution.

In the fields

In January 1665 Samuel Pepys met Jane Welsh, a maid of Mr Jervas, at the Exchange. The pair went to *The Three Cranes* from where they journeyed by boat to *The Falcon*. Upon arrival Samuel and Jane ventured into the fields where they talked for an hour, during which time Pepys made several sexual advances towards the girl. Jane Welsh was not the only woman Pepys lured away from the city. In June 1665 he travelled by coach out to Tothill Fields to take the air and eat cakes with Doll Lane, and the next month took Mary by coach from the New Exchange to Highgate and Hampstead.¹⁷⁰ A year and a day later, Samuel arrived at his office to find Mrs Burroughs waiting for

¹⁷⁰ Pepys, *Diary*, 27 January 1665; 1 June 1665; 11 July 1665, vi, pp.22, 114, 155.

him. 'I did her business and sent her away by agreement', he wrote, 'and presently I by coach after her and took her up in Fenchurch-street – and away through the city'.

So into the fields Uxbridge way, a mile or two beyond Tyburne, and then back, and then to Paddington, and then back to Lyssengreen, a place the coachman led me to (I never knew in my life), and there we eat and dran[k]; and so back to Charing Crosse and there I set her down.

Less than two months later Pepys and Mrs Burroughs travelled to Lyssen Green to have dinner, then took a coach 'up and down in the country' towards Acton, Chelsea, and finally to Westminster.¹⁷¹ London women were not confined to the city any more than they were to their homes, but just as being in the streets, market places and public houses of the capital could affect their reputations and credit, so too could their presence in the hinterlands of the metropolis.

London was a city of migrants, and Londoners continued to move in, out, and around the city after they had settled in the capital. Laura Gowing has argued that the fields around the capital connoted illicit sex and prostitution, and that women and men used them differently, the former for work, the latter for leisure. Women felt obliged to explain their presence in the fields, but men had no such constraints.¹⁷² Ester Sowernam noted that when 'a man and a woman talke in the fields together, an honest minde will imagine of their talke answerable to his owne disposition, whereas an evil disposed minde will censure according to his lewd inclination'.¹⁷³ However, the range of activities occurring in the fields and villages around London suggests that the picture may be more complex. For some Londoners the fields provided a location for the fulfilment of sensual pleasures, and opportunities for clandestine affairs and secret meetings. For others, the field offered space for innocent recreations. Taverns, cake-

¹⁷¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 12 July 1666; 8 August 1666, vii, pp.204-05, 240.

¹⁷² Gowing, 'Freedom of the streets', pp.144-45.

¹⁷³ E. Sowernam, *Ester hath hang'd Haman: Or An Answere to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignment of Women* (London, 1617), p.37.

sellers, bowling alleys, fortune-tellers, and medical practitioners were all to be found in the areas surrounding the capital.¹⁷⁴

The recognition that women were at risk in the fields had biblical origins. Robert Cleaver cited the book of *Deuteronomy* in which it was written that if a man abused a betrothed maid in either the city or the fields he would be stoned to death.¹⁷⁵ Edward Kirk murdered his wife Joan in the fields near Paddington.¹⁷⁶ On 5 February 1675, shortly after they arrived in London, George Allen, a butcher from Uxbridge, murdered his wife in the fields near the gravel pits behind Islington.¹⁷⁷ After dark the fields became especially dangerous. One young woman was murdered in Stepney beyond Whitechapel Church in a place called 'Tom-turds Field'. Several people had been robbed there and the field was described as 'always looked upon as very Dangerous for Passingers, after Night is shut in'.¹⁷⁸ Margaret Jarvys was attacked on 18 August 1581 in Hamylandes Grove between nine and twelve o'clock at night by John Cutler, a labourer, who wounded her in the throat with a meat knife. On 10 October 1586 Alice White, an Enfield spinster, was at a field called Nockholes, and fell into dispute with William Harlowe who grew angry at her 'opprobrious speech' and broke her skull with a hedge-stake.¹⁷⁹ Of course the fields could be dangerous for men as well. Henry Goodcole warned his male readers, 'if a woman come unto you alone, with inticing faire promises of Curtezan courtesies, to meete you in the Fields, or some other private remote places, remember the case of Mr Claxton and Mr Holt', who had been murdered there.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ M. Pelling, 'Skirting the city? Disease, social change and divided households in the seventeenth century' in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds), *Londinopolis: Essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), pp.158-59.

¹⁷⁵ Cleaver, *Householde Government*, pp.113-14.

¹⁷⁶ OBP, 2 July 1684, t16840702-6.

¹⁷⁷ *News from the Sessions. Or, The Whole Tryal of George Allen The Butcher Who Murthered his Wife in the Fields behind Islington, On Friday the 5th of the Instant February, And the manner how the same came to be Discovered* (London, 1675), p.4.

¹⁷⁸ *An Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Murder* (London, 1684).

¹⁷⁹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, pp.128, 167-68.

¹⁸⁰ Goodcole, *Heavens Speedie Hue and Cry*, Sig. Cv.

Like private chambers, the fields were a secret place where infanticides might be committed and the bodies of infants hidden. Jane Stanly gave birth to a boy in a field called Cookes Cloase at Whitechapel and murdered him by crushing his head with her hands so that he died instantly. Elizabeth Edlyn gave birth to a boy in the house of her master John Page in Wembley. Between eight and ten that evening Francis Shoosmithe, a brewer, carried the baby away to a field called Bogers Croftes in Harrow on the Hill and suffocated it. Jane Little gave birth to a girl 'alone and secretly' in 'the Common Field' and killed her by burying her in a hole.¹⁸¹ Katharine Brown was delivered of her bastard infant in a meadow and murdered the child by drowning it in a brook.¹⁸²

Women were often propositioned in the fields or taken there for sex. Edward Thickens approached Agnes Brisley whilst she was drying clothes in the fields and asked her to come to his house, where he got her to wash his clothes and had the use of her body. Anne Sewsmyth told how George Idell had the use of her body in a field in Greenwich. Alice Johnson claimed that Richard Wood had the use of her body in Halling Wood and that he was the father of her child. Jasper Williams confessed to having sex with Elizabeth Alice in the fields near Clerkenwell in a cock of hay.¹⁸³ William Lane claimed he had seen John Dudley with a 'hedge whore' in a ditch'.¹⁸⁴ Richard Moore was accused of being 'in the company of a lewd suspicious woman and a common field-walker and for assaulting a child about eight years of age'.¹⁸⁵ The term 'field-walker' like that of 'nightwalker' had negative connotations that were used to discourage and curtail the movements of reputable women.

When venturing out of the city into the fields women had to be assertive and able to stand up to any men who sought to proposition them. The author of *Foure*

¹⁸¹ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume I*, pp.83, 120, 214.

¹⁸² OBP, 14 October 1685, t16851014-27.

¹⁸³ GL MS 33011/4, fos. 30v, 39r, 46v, 90r.

¹⁸⁴ LMA DL/C/231, fo. 18r.

¹⁸⁵ Jeaffreson (ed.), *Middlesex County Records Volume III*, p.97.

pence halfepenny Farthing described walking in the fields and seeing a lad and a fair maid discussing ‘some petty bargaine’. When he approached them the boy fled, and when the balladeer spoke to the girl she claimed she had sought to con him of his money rather than give in to his demands.¹⁸⁶ One jest described ‘a Scoffing Gallant’ walking in the fields who encountered a milkmaid ‘going a milking bare-legg’d’, and asked ‘Fair Maid, how long have you worn those stockings?’ Her reply was that she had worn the stockings ‘and a pair of Breeches of the same’ for the last twenty-three years, and that there was ‘but one hole in them’, which she invited the gallant to put his nose in.¹⁸⁷

The fields also had some positive associations, however, and several plays depicted young women enjoying themselves in the hinterlands of the capital. In *The Alchemist* Face refers to ‘younkers’, ‘tits’, and ‘tomboys’ meeting each Sunday in Moorfields.¹⁸⁸ In *Bartholomew Fair* Quarlous describes how Win Littlewit ‘courts it to Tottenham to eat cream’.¹⁸⁹ In *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* ‘the young couple walk daily abroad, being entertained and treated by all their friends and acquaintances; and then travel into the Country for their pleasure’. ‘Lets go and see Master and Mistress such a one, and walk out of Town to refresh ourselves, or else go and take the air upon the Thames with a Pair of Oars’, suggests the husband.¹⁹⁰

Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys often travelled into the fields around the capital. In 1662 Pepys travelled to Moorfields and Islington by coach with Elizabeth and two female friends to walk in the fields, and the next month they returned to Moorfields where they walked and ate cheesecakes and gammon. In 1665 Samuel and Elizabeth travelled to Mile End Green to eat cream and cakes, and Mary Mercer accompanied them when they took a coach ride to Islington to eat at ‘the old house’. In the summer

¹⁸⁶ ‘Foure pence halfepenny Farthing: Or, A Woman will have the Oddes’, *Pepys* i, pp.274-75.

¹⁸⁷ *London Jests*, p.202.

¹⁸⁸ Jonson, *Alchemist*, V. v. 79-80, p.479.

¹⁸⁹ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, I. iii. 49-54, p.500.

¹⁹⁰ Marsh, *Ten Pleasures*, pp.52, 54-55.

of 1666 the couple went with Betty Michell and her husband into the fields beyond Hackney to take the air, whilst the following spring Samuel and Elizabeth, 'the two Mercers' and the maids Barker and Jane ventured 'over the water to the Jamaica-house' where 'the girls did run for wagers over the bowling green', and a week later they went with Mercer by coach to Kingsland and Islington to eat and drink at *The King's Head*.¹⁹¹

In large groups, especially if patriarchal males were present, it was possible for women to enjoy rather than fear being in the London fields. Like the city itself, the hinterlands of the metropolis offered many recreational activities for both women and men. However, whilst the London streets were depicted as full of predatory women, the fields were portrayed as dangerous for women, frequently associated with illicit sex, murder, and the concealment of infanticide. Women alone or even in pairs risked being approached by predatory males, and needed to be strong-willed and physically powerful to protect themselves.

Conclusion

Throughout the early modern capital and the neighbouring suburbs and fields women could be found buying and selling, working, attending services, and even relaxing, apparently enjoying the freedom to move between spaces some historians have sought to define as public and private. However, the presence of a woman anywhere in the city and its hinterlands raised questions as to why she was there. Whilst the concept of privacy carried great weight in early modern London it was not always equated with either female space or honour. Early modern dwellings were permeable in every possible sense, and to a large extent even in a domestic environment a woman needed to be constantly on display and in the company of others in order to retain her honour.

¹⁹¹ Pepys, *Diary*, 5 April 1662; 19 May 1662, iii, pp.59, 86; 14 April 1665; 30 May 1665, vi, pp.80, 112; 15 July 1666, vii, p.207; 14 April 1667; 21 April 1667, viii, pp.167, 174-75.

Women's freedom to inhabit city spaces and travel in and outside London was neither unconditional nor unproblematic, as everywhere women went they were treated with suspicion and needed to explain and justify their presence. Women could walk the streets with relative freedom during daylight hours if they kept to respectable areas of the capital. At market working respectable women kept to their own stalls, sold their wares, and did not engage in banter with customers and passers-by. Women were part of the clientele and staff of public houses, but were expected to be more restrained in their behaviour than men. Both the type of public house and the time of day affected how a woman's presence was perceived. A woman could go into an alehouse alone if on business, but in terms of sociability she was ideally to go in a group of women and men for a specific reason, such as a betrothal. Attitudes to women working in public houses were also varied, but a good hostess was deemed to be one who was friendly, polite, and who served good food and drink in a pleasant environment. Outside the metropolitan streets women had to be just as cautious. Although the fields could be a pleasant recreational environment, they could also be dangerous, especially after dark. Whether in their houses, on the streets, or in the fields reputable London women were to ensure they could always be seen, but were to avoid being conspicuous. For both early modern Londoners and inquisitive historians reputable women were omnipresent, but difficult to find, since ideally they busied themselves about their household chores, or blended seamlessly into the London crowds.

Conclusion

In 1996 Laura Gowing asserted that in early modern London 'the goodness of women's name was contingent on not being spoken of at all – a good name meant no name'.¹ To some extent Gowing was correct. Church, state, and to a degree society, viewed chastity, silence, and obedience to a father or husband as basic requirements that ensured a woman remained within the boundaries of respectability and maintained her honour. Yet Gowing also stressed that 'the exercise of moral discipline involved more than the absorption of the ideals of church and state into popular morality'.² In daily life female reputation, honour, and credit depended on deeds and actions, not merely passivity and invisibility. Women needed to fashion respectable self-images, negotiate positions of authority, and earn credit in their households and local communities. A minority of godly women attempted to conform to the restrictive ideals of patriarchal ideology, but for the majority being a good woman was never about being passive, but about self-presentation, hard work, and living in harmony with one's family, friends, and neighbours.

Questions of agency, self-worth and competitiveness are central to understanding codes of plebeian female honour in early modern society. All women desired a degree of agency, but their actions were restricted by the need to maintain a good reputation. Whilst conforming wholeheartedly to patriarchal expectations would have safeguarded their honour, women themselves were unlikely to have felt much sense of self-worth by doing so, and they may have faced criticism from other women as weak-willed and subservient. Bernard Capp has noted that 'the sense of public responsibility that drove respectable women to police the behaviour of their neighbours underlines cultural

¹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.270.

² Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.263.

division as well as identity'.³ However, divisions between women were not just between the respectable and the disreputable. In seeking to gain a good name respectable women often competed with each other. Who was the most beautiful or best-dressed? Who was the best mother with the most healthy and obedient children? Who was the cleanest, most hard-working housewife? Who managed her servants best? Who was the best neighbour? Yet the process of winning a good name could bring women together as well as create divisions between them. By sharing beauty hints and fertility advice, borrowing clothes from each other and going shopping together, assisting with childcare and household duties, and acting as good neighbours by participating in an 'economy of mutual favours'⁴ bonds of community and friendship were forged and strengthened between women.

Every woman and man had their own ideas about what constituted honourable, reputable female behaviour. Such values came from various places. Individuals listened to sermons, overheard ballads, listened to neighbourhood gossip and rumour, and watched alternative versions of daily life in households, streets and on the London stage. Customs and traditions, although arguably less important in the capital than in the provinces⁵, still impacted on women's behaviour, and mothers conveyed advice to their daughters orally and in letters and legacies. Women had to weave together the disparate ideas they encountered, based on what their consciences told them was right, but also on what their family, friends and neighbours expected of them. Just as she had to navigate her way through the increasingly complex metropolitan streets and stay clear of the less respectable neighbourhoods, a woman's life was also determined by a moral compass

³ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.381.

⁴ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p.56.

⁵ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.266.

that restricted her everyday behaviour.⁶ But the boundaries of respectability were by no means fixed, and they altered according to wealth, marital status, age, place, and time.

Chastity, of course, was the bedrock of female respectability, but if a woman was, or was believed to be chaste, what could she do to improve her reputation and earn social credit? Then as now women were judged by their physical appearance. Women needed to maintain certain standards of personal hygiene and keep in good health in order to be considered beautiful and to be able to carry out their daily tasks. Beauty was to a large extent equated with youth and was supposed to be natural rather than maintained with the aid of cosmetics. Beautiful women were considered to be those with noble and delicate features and a pale complexion, although curvaceous and buxom figures were praised as well. Since clothes to some extent clarified nationality, social rank and marital status women were also judged on what they wore. Female attire was not to be too expensive or too extravagant, and if a woman wore expensive clothes her neighbours might become suspicious as to how she had obtained such finery. At the same time women were expected to make the most of their appearances, and often personalised their clothes with ribbons, flowers, and laces. Minimum standards of decent attire were expected, and poor women received donations and gifts of clothes or money in order to dress appropriately. When a woman gained a new post in service she expected to be provided with clothes as well as food and lodging. As married women were expected to dress to a degree befitting their husband's social status, wives expected to be given an allowance for clothes. Good self-presentation was beneficial to women, helping them to find both work and husbands, and being attractive and well-presented was vitally important if they wanted to be admired and treated with respect.

⁶ As suggested by M. R., *The Mothers Counsell Or, Life within Compasse* (London, 1631).

Those women who were treated with greatest respect were married women with children. Garthine Walker has argued that being a good housewife was one of the main ways in which middling-sort and plebeian women earned respect and credit, but she was also correct to suggest that motherhood offered another means for married women to gain greater respectability.⁷ Bearing children was regarded by the clergy as a sign that a woman was blessed by God, but women themselves admired and envied mothers for different reasons. Bearing children was literally women's work, and both women and men were well aware of the difficulties and dangers involved. The ability to have children also suggested that sexual relations were good between husband and wife, since the former was aroused by his spouse, indicating that she was physically attractive. Good mothers were expected to breastfeed their babies, or at least find a healthy and compassionate wet-nurse. More generally mothers were to balance love and discipline. Women were not to cosset their children, but to raise them to be independent and useful from an early age, for example by running errands. At the same time, mothers were to do all they could to protect their children, and women themselves felt they were entitled to confront their husbands, parents, and neighbours if it was for the good of the child. Both women and the London parishes and the hospitals shared the belief that children ought to remain with their mothers, even in difficult circumstances, suggesting that women's work in caring and providing for their children was valued and admired. To varying degrees such duties continued throughout the lives of most women. On many occasions, however, adult offspring misread maternal concern as unwanted interference, and ultimately being a good mother also entailed knowing when not to interfere as well as when to stand up for her children.

⁷ G. Walker, 'Expanding the Boundaries of Female Honour in Early Modern England' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 6 (1996), p.245.

Housewifery and servant management were the other domestic duties expected of women. Wives were to be helpmeets and sources of comfort to their husbands, but also to offer counsel and practical assistance in running a household. Advice could often be critical, and women considered they had a right to voice their concerns about drunken and profligate husbands, and to take control of domestic affairs if matters were getting out of hand. Indeed, to a large extent confidence and assertiveness were perceived as being admirable and desirable qualities in a wife, as well as beauty, wealth, and wisdom. Men also sought practical skills in a prospective wife, such as the ability to bake, brew, card, clean, cook, and spin. Women were expected to have acquired such skills during domestic service, apprenticeships, or from female relatives, and as mistresses were to convey such wisdom to their own maidservants. In addition mistresses were expected to provide their maids with basic necessities such as food and clothing, to educate them in religion, and to enforce good order through physical discipline if necessary. However, good mistresses also showed compassion to the adolescent girls and young women in their charge, protecting them from predatory men, aiding their attempts to find husbands, and providing them with gifts and advice, sometimes even after they had left service.

Beyond the household women were judged on their interactions with other people in their local communities. Women were praised for being good, civil neighbours, though they were frowned upon for idle gossiping and unnecessary gadding abroad, especially by men. Finding the acceptable and appropriate level was one of the many challenges that women faced in negotiating the social and cultural boundaries of the age. Women were expected to join in the celebrations of the lifecycle and ritual year, just as men were. But they were condemned for socialising excessively with men who were not their husbands, whilst the sociability of all young single women was observed closely.

Heavy drinking and late night socialising were also condemned. Some godly women went to the other extreme and restricted their sociability to occasions when they accompanied their husbands on visits, and interacted only with like-minded souls, but most sought to socialise in polite company with their neighbours. Being hospitable was a sign of good neighbourliness, and was a major reason for keeping one's home in good order. Charity was also deemed praiseworthy. Wealthier middling-sort women made bequests and independent donations to the poor, but in most instances women were to advise their husbands how and to whom to give charity. By being paid to take in the destitute, sick and impoverished, poorer women could cement their role as useful members in their parish communities, and supplement their household incomes. Similarly women who took in lodgers might be praised for the accommodation, food, and medical care they provided.

Whether in the home, street, marketplace, alehouse, or fields women needed to be aware of the dangers and implications of private intimacy and avoid being alone in male company in enclosed spaces. A women's purpose determined the acceptability of her being in a given location. Venturing into certain areas of the capital, into public houses, or into the fields would not be detrimental to her reputation if she was going there as part of her work or to visit a friend or relative, but in general respectable women avoided being in the streets or the fields after dark, places they would have been in on other occasions. Many women felt a sense of belonging to a street or neighbourhood, and they were often reluctant to leave if this meant having to construct a good reputation in an unknown community.

The London environment affected the manner and type of respectable identities that women sought to fashion. Personal appearance was highly important in the capital

where most people were migrants, and where individuals often had to be judged at first sight. It was also easier to obtain cosmetics and fashionable clothes, but London women were condemned for being obsessed with their physical appearances, suggesting that a careful balance had to be sought. The same was true of household furnishings, where individuals might have a personal view on what constituted decency or extravagance, but would face criticism if they strayed too far from the values of their local community. In terms of family life metropolitan child mortality levels were higher than in the provinces, and a greater likelihood of remarriage meant that women and men often had to adapt to a new spouse. The balance between time spent in the household and in the wider community was also different for London women. The existence of numerous bake-houses, victualling-houses, and public-houses suggests that housewifery skills of cooking and brewing may have been less important for London women, and as wives could operate as independent traders some may have enjoyed greater financial autonomy. The increase and feminisation of domestic service after 1660 enabled single women to shift for themselves with greater ease. Finally the large demographic turnover in terms of lodgers and servants made metropolitan households less stable and more open than those in the provinces, and made it difficult for women to develop identities and solidarities based on neighbourhood and parish.⁸

Age and marital status also affected female honour. Early modern England was a gerontocratic as well as a patriarchal society, and age created divisions between women as much as between men. Keith Thomas suggested that age could sometimes mean a rise in authority for women, and that after the age of forty women gained in status what they lost in physical allure, and that a middling-sort widow often gained a new independence

⁸ Laura Gowing has argued that it was easier for men to develop community solidarities through shared work identities fostered by apprenticeships and guild memberships: Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.15.

after the death of her husband.⁹ More recently, however, Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing have argued that as mothers and as witnesses before the church courts, women lost authority as they aged, and even Thomas acknowledged that elderly women were often objects of mockery.¹⁰ Contemporary judgements about women therefore took age into account, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that as a woman aged she was necessarily granted less respect. Alexandra Shepard has employed Robert Connell's notion of 'the patriarchal dividend' to explain why only some men were able to enjoy the benefits of patriarchy.¹¹ Similarly, women between their late twenties and early forties were considered at the apex of womanhood. Such women were still considered beautiful or at least handsome, were probably married with children, and were old enough to manage their maidservants, but also young enough that the women in their employ felt comfortable confiding in them as friends or older sisters. It was at this stage in the lifecycle that women were most respected and most likely to achieve good reputations and high social credit by fulfilling their expected roles as mothers, housewives and mistresses.

In 1668, at the height of her fury with her husband, Elizabeth Pepys demanded that Samuel call Deb Willet 'whore'.¹² Just as that most ubiquitous of defamatory insults, 'a word of vague and telling power',¹³ continued to have significance after the Restoration, so too did traditional ideals of female behaviour. Like so much of women's history, the history of female honour is one of continuity rather than change; indeed,

⁹ K. Thomas, 'Age and Authority in Early Modern England', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 62 (1976), pp.235-36, 243-45.

¹⁰ P. Crawford, 'The construction and experience of maternity in seventeenth-century England' in id., *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 2004), p.100; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.50; Thomas, 'Age and Authority', pp.243-45. See also the early modern essays in L. Botelho and P. Thane (eds.), *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow, 2001).

¹¹ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, p.5.

¹² Pepys, *Diary*, 20 November 1668, ix, pp.369-70.

¹³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.1.

advice for women on what not to wear and how to be a 'domestic goddess' seems to grow daily. Numerous strands of advice, therefore, had to be woven into coherent identities by those striving for respectability in a society that was quick to denigrate women, but could also bestow praise on them.

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